

THOUGHTS
ON THE
DIVINE GOODNESS,

RELATIVE TO THE
GOVERNMENT OF MORAL AGENTS,
PARTICULARLY DISPLAYED IN
FUTURE REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS.

Translated from the French of
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God our Saviour will have all men to be saved, and to come
unto the knowledge of the truth. ----- 1 Tim. ii. 4.

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P R E F A C E

OF THE

T R A N S L A T O R.

THE Translator of the following pages, having witnessed the approbation they met with abroad, the ardour with which they were sought, and the difficulty with which they were obtained, thinks it may be rendering service to the cause of religion, and contributing to the happiness of mankind, to make them easy of access, in a nation distinguished by its literature, and which, in theology and philosophy, has produced so many luminaries.

The Author, a native of Neufchatel, must be well known to many in this country, having resided in its capital for several years. All who were acquainted with him there, or in Switzerland, admired and honoured him. If, in his tenets, he differs from those universally held in the Christian, even Protestant churches, the candid and judicious reader will not be repulsed by the cry of heresy; for it is to truths thus stigmatized, that the reformation owed its rise. Let them read, examine, and determine for themselves.

Nor let the humble pious follower of the gospel take the alarm, or apprehend the motives to virtue will be weakened, and mankind grow more licentious. To behold the plan of the Deity, as more consistent with his nature and attributes, and more merciful to his creatures, can never be an incentive to vice. Fear is in-

deed one powerful restraint on imperfect beings; but it must be a rational fear, and not such as has given rise to infidelity in thousands, or which, if believed, leads to despair.—

Besides, let me ask, Have the terrors of the Lord, when represented in all the horrors of never ending misery, been sufficient to deter many from offending, who have been familiar with the idea from their infancy? Universal observation shews the contrary. Our Saviour *draws us by the cords of love*: But if there is a wretch so base as to sin because grace has abounded, and, with dauntless effrontery, ventures to challenge the power and justice of his Maker, let him learn, that in proportion to his guilt and depravity will be his future punishment, both in degree and duration. But let the honour of the wise and merciful Creator be vindicated, and man-

kind be taught to consider him as altogether amiable, whose severities are as much the effect of his goodness as his rewards. Thus shall his love and his fear arise together in our hearts; thus will he be known and honoured, *and Wisdom be justified of her children.*

Thirst of fame is disregarded by one who remains concealed; but tho' I wish to derive no personal merit as a translator, I would carefully avoid diminishing that of the Author, to whose sentiments it shall be my endeavour to do justice, by a faithful, but not a tedious translation. All who are conversant with the nature of the French language, know that it admits of a certain declamatory style, which they call *unction*, and which does not so well correspond with the genius of the English. Entirely to divest this work of its original idiom, would perhaps be to rob

it of that spirit and energy by which the author has distinguished it. The reader is therefore solicited, if, in the course of this translation, some deviations from the established mode of English diction should be found unavoidable, candidly to place them to this account. They will occur as seldom as possible; for, though nobler motives than gratifying the ear by the harmony of flowing periods, actuate the person who gives this essay to the public, yet, as far as sense and sound can be conciliated, the Translator would not wish to deprive it even of that recommendation.

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PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE.

TO render mankind universally and perfectly happy, seems to be the plan on which the Supreme Creator has established his moral government :---and the method he employs to compass an end so worthy of its Author, is that of *enlightening their minds*. From whence it follows, that from the knowledge of this plan may be derived just views of that felicity which the greatest and best of Beings has graciously intended to dispense to the children of men ; and of the means by which he will conduct them to it, *the knowledge of the truth*.

This system is clearly expressed in that passage of Scripture, which I have made choice of in the title of this work, where the Apostle declares, that *God will have all men to be saved*---this is their destination ; *and to come at the knowledge of the truth*, is the mean by which he will raise them to it.

I therefore dedicate the following pages to the examination and development of these sublime words of St Paul.

The plan of God towards mankind, is in nothing different from religion itself, considered in its theory. For though religion, taken in a general view, is the science of happiness and of salvation, yet it may be divided into the two branches of theory and practice. In its theory, it holds up to us salvation, as the destination to which God, by his providence and grace, calls us; thus far it is the plan of our great Creator, which I shall endeavour to illustrate in this work. But when taken in a practical view, it shews us salvation as the grand end we are invariably to propose to ourselves, and to which we are constantly to tend, by exerting all our efforts to the enlightning of our understandings, and the sanctifying of our hearts. In this point of view, religion is that part of his plan which the Supreme Being has assigned to us, that we may submit with docility to his government, and thereby become worthy of his benevolent designs towards us; or, as the Apostle expresses it, *be workers together with him.*

Though the practical part of religion is of such superior importance, that even the most perfect theory, separated from it, is so totally useless, that St James represents a faith of that nature as dead ; yet it is of the theory of religion that I mean to treat, as that is incomparably more corrupted and disfigured by error, as I shall shew, by explaining my reasons more particularly.

Although mankind are universally made capable of knowing the truth, their progress towards it is slow, and obstructed by many difficulties ; and amidst their almost imperceptible advances, ignorance, imagination, and passion, have leisure sufficient left them *to change the truth of God into a lie* ; that is, to corrupt and falsify the first ideas of truth, even though revealed by himself. Their primitive ignorance renders them strangely presumptuous and decisive ; their gross imagination, obscuring reason, has served them as a guide, insinuating itself as a judge of things spiritual, which belong exclusively to the more noble faculty of the mind.

But above all, self-love, temporal interest, sloth, vanity, pride, and a long list of other

corrupt passions, make them deviate and wander through a maze of the most absurd, and sometimes the most monstrous errors, which they never fail to associate with the truths of religion, however incompatible. And as these errors are the unhappy effect of passion, they are afterwards supported by it. How often do men maintain them with a warmth bordering on fury, and impose them on the faith of others with an inhuman ferocity, deciding for the rest of mankind, and even for posterity, by a plurality of voices, what they shall in future be obliged to believe or profess as the truth revealed by God, under pain of damnation in the world to come, and frequently of the most cruel sufferings in this ! Such are the bitter fruits, the sad but inevitable effects of the ignorance, the imagination, and the passions of mankind, even under that dispensation of light which God has vouchsafed them. Deplorable effects ! which, by the obstinate Deist, are charged upon religion itself. What I have said on the corruption of truth in the hands of man, is no more than what fatal experience has proved, more or less, in every age.

To what else are we to ascribe that strange fatality, by which we see the absurd side of questions, though never so revolting and extravagant, prevailing over the simple, natural, and rational, almost wherever they have been agitated? Such absurd errors, when once received, and consecrated by public authority, and by their antiquity, become the formidable obstacles of truth, and gain such a fatal ascendancy even over the minds of those whose understandings reject them, as leads them to suppress the truth, and tacitly to immolate it at the shrine of falsehood, by imposing upon it the most rigorous silence; leaving to error, known to be such, the exclusive privilege of appearing publicly, and of perpetuating itself, by being openly and freely taught to the multitude. And can the sacred rights of truth be thus misconceived! I say misconceived; for who that properly knows their value, can dare to trample them under foot? But when we reflect on the obstacles she meets with, may we not be tempted for a moment to believe, as some have boldly advanced, that she was of a nature too sublime and

elevated for man, who, instead of being formed capable of receiving her, was made the eternal and melancholy sport of ignorance and error. But far be from us a thought so contrary to the plan of infinite wisdom, *who wills that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth*; consequently he has created them for it, notwithstanding their original ignorance, their gross imaginations, and turbulent passions.

Now, it is on the theory of religion that the evils resulting from the above causes have principally fallen: Its admirable morality has better resisted the contagion; though when we see, on the one hand, a thousand dangerous illusions and superstitions corrupting its purity; and, on the other, the motives to virtue, which are the very essence of morality, and are derived from its theory, perverted, enfeebled, enervated, and almost annihilated, we must lament that it has not wholly escaped the infection. What then can be more necessary, than to disencumber religion from the errors which corrupt it, and to present it to mankind in its primitive purity? This shall be

my endeavour in this treatise, by faithfully displaying *the eternal plan of divine government, as made known by God himself, both by nature and revelation.*

It is in this two-fold manner that the Source of all truth has communicated to us the scheme of his mercy. First, by a *natural revelation*, by which he enlightens our reason, in offering to its contemplation the admirable works of creation. Secondly, by a *supernatural revelation*, by which he condescends to supply the original weakness of our rational powers, and gives us his word, as a more perfect and more efficacious assistance.

It is to our reason that God addresses himself in both these revelations; with this capital difference, however, that in the former, what we know of the being, perfections, and designs of God, must be deduced from the contemplation of nature, and result from our own discoveries; whereas in the latter, we must only attend with humility and docility, and comprehend him who speaks for the purpose of enlightning us; for rea-

son cannot be benefited by what it does not understand.

The question, Why God has revealed himself in these two ways? is not proper to be discussed here. One very remarkable observation may however be made, which is founded on their perfect agreement: For, as the design of our Creator is to bring us to the knowledge of the truth, it is impossible that he should deceive his creatures, and not be himself the God of all truth; consequently his revelations, far from contradicting each other, must be found in perfect harmony.

But as God has manifested himself to us in his works and in his word, it is in these two sacred sources, and in these alone, that we are to seek for the knowledge of his plan, and not in the opinions of our fellow mortals, which are so different, and often so opposite. We may, and we certainly ought to consult them, and examine carefully the reasons on which they are grounded, in order to profit by their labours, and use them as succours for the better comprehending our Maker; but it is God, and God alone, to whom we are obliged indispensibly to at-

tend, and by the touchstone of reason and Scripture must every human opinion be tried.

When we consult reason for the proper understanding of holy writ, we draw at once from these two sources. When, for instance, any passage is there susceptible, by the ambiguity of its expression, of two different meanings, because the same term may sometimes have a literal, and sometimes a figurative sense annexed to it, it is then the province of reason to determine which of the two is the sense of the passage in question, by adopting that which agrees with the nature of things, of God, of man ; and rejecting that which is unnatural, absurd, and false. Such is the use we are to make of reason in the interpretation of Scripture.

And here I solemnly protest, in the presence of the Almighty, that in reading and meditating on his word, to know his will and designs towards us, I have, with sincerity, and in his fear, adhered to this rule : I have sought truth in its purity, with simplicity of heart, without hope or fear of its agreeing or disagreeing with that catechism

which I have been taught to receive in my youth without sufficient examination ; well convinced, that if such or such opinions were true, I should find them confirmed in Scripture ; if false, they would not become true by my obstinately persisting to believe them without examination ; so that I had nothing to lose, or rather I had every thing to gain, by bringing them sincerely to this test, since the only thing of importance to me was to fly from error, and to come at the knowledge of the truth.

And this impartial study of Scripture has been attended with great advantage to me. It has confirmed and established me in some of my former opinions, which I have found to be divine truths, and opened my eyes upon others, which I have perceived to be the offspring of prejudice and error.

It has certainly exposed me to some temporal inconvenience, in the exercise of my ecclesiastical functions ; as instead of examining the truth or falsehood of my doctrine, the clergy condemned me to silence, which being contrary to the dictates of my conscience, was followed by my deposition. Thus circumstanced, I was obliged to seek,

in a foreign country, that protection and independence which my own refused me. The success of my endeavours having placed me above the reach of temporal cares, I devote the leisure, with which Providence has blessed me, to the interest of truth and the benefit of mankind, adhering scrupulously throughout this work to the rules I have laid down, consulting only reason and the word of God, and advancing nothing but what appears to me agreeable to these guides; convinced, that were I to violate this sacred obligation, I should be guilty of the most audacious and criminal prevarication.

As I disclaim all other authorities, however useful to my subject, so I equally renounce all personal controversy, and confine myself entirely to the combat between truth and error.

I mean not, however, by these protestations, to prepossess the world in favour of my tenets. I have laid down the only rules by which they must stand or fall; therefore, setting aside the prejudices of education, and carefully examining what I shall advance, let every one judge and determine for themselves. Whoever proceeds other-

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wise can never read with advantage, not even Scripture itself, but resembles those whom St. Paul describes as *ever learning, and never able to come at the knowledge of the truth*; as the mass of prejudices form that veil upon the heart, with which the same Apostle reproaches the Jews, and which made a learned divine of this century observe, in a Latin epigram on the Bible, *That it was a book where every one sought his opinions, and where every one found them.* This has given occasion to the Deist to reproach revelation with obscurity; whereas the whole of religion, if it may be resolved into the designs of God towards his creatures, and what he requires of them towards the rendering them fit objects of his favour, is sufficiently clear to all who, with the docility of little children, will listen to its instructions, and obey its dictates.

It may appear to some necessary, previous to my present undertaking, that I should prove the divine authority of that revelation on which it depends; but this subject has been so frequently, and so ably treated by numbers, that I think it needless to enter upon it again, any farther than its celef-

tial origin may be deducible, by every candid mind, from the beauty, grandeur, and harmony of a design, which, comprehending so many ages since the beginning of the world, cannot be the production of an impostor; which is a sufficient internal proof of its divinity.

Religion has, in our age, sustained, on every side, a multitude of attacks from different quarters, and under every disguise, which, as they have occasioned the discussion of many important questions, have led to an examination favourable to the cause of truth. The objections of the Deists to Christianity are of two kinds; the one levelled against its external proofs and documents, such as the miracles and prophecies it contains; the other relating to its substance, and attacking its doctrines, whether of theory or practice. With respect to the former, they have been answered in a manner that has turned to the advantage of religion; but I am far from being able to say as much of the replies that have been offered in defence of its doctrines: Here the combatants have not stood on equal ground; for its advocates, in vindicating the dogmas

of religion, have thought themselves obliged to maintain them, not in the simplicity of holy writ, but as they were taught in different communions of Christians, and represented in the creeds or confessions of their churches; hence a number of objections to which no satisfactory answer has ever been given, because on those terms they are absolutely unsurmountable, since it is impossible to make light agree with darkness. To give but one example of these triumphant objections---How can it even be made comprehensible, that a Being infinitely good can consign the greatest part of his creatures over to never ending torments? It is, however, necessary that these objections of the second class should be answered, and that religion should be disengaged from every thing that may tarnish and obscure its lustre: For as long as it shall present a hideous mixture of truth and error, it cannot carry with it that light and evidence which are necessary to convince the understanding, and gain the heart; but will expose men to baneful illusions, cruel doubts, and even to the fatal danger of falling at length into incredulity and irreligion.

With respect to the form of this work, I am not solicitous to clothe it in the ornaments of flowery language; simplicity, perspicuity, and evidence, have ever appeared more attractive in my eyes. I confide in the majesty and importance of my subject to interest my reader, and captivate his attention. And what subject can be more sublime than to explain the plan of God, and his councils towards man! August by its *Author*; precious and interesting by its *object*; luminous and harmonious by the *value of its materials, and the beauty of its structure*; elevated and delightful by its *tendency*; and sovereignly glorious and marvellous by the *amazing difficulty of its execution, and by the magnificence of its effects*. Its *Author* is he who is infinitely wise, good, and powerful; its *object* is the universal and final happiness of the whole human race, without exception of a single individual; the *rich materials that compose it*, are those magnificent truths that go hand in hand, and, by a natural connection, form the most beautiful whole that an intelligent being can possibly contemplate; its *tendency*, that of bringing us all to the highest perfection,

and the utmost happiness of which our natures are susceptible ; and *the difficulty of its execution, and the magnificence of its effects*, no other than rendering the human race, such as they have shewn themselves from the foundation of the world to the present moment, a race of beings plunged in the most profound darkness, lost in the most monstrous errors, degraded and tyrannized by the most disorderly and violent passions, odious by the most horrid and detestible crimes ; unhappy, in their physical and moral state, by all these dreadful sources of misery---it is nothing less than to render such beings enlightened, rational, and pure in their sentiments ; amiable by every virtue, excellent by every action, and happy by their perfection, their celestial state, and, above all, by their glorious union with God himself ! Of how little moment will the ornaments of diction appear to any one convinced of the importance, and elevated by the dignity of the subject ! May its divine energy penetrate my heart, and I shall not fear of making my labours useful and acceptable to the world.

OF THE

INFINITE GOODNESS OF GOD.

God is love. 1 JOHN iv. 8.

IT is not necessary, in a work of this nature, to enter into a complete detail on the existence and perfections of God, any farther than as they enable us to judge with certainty of his designs towards us. And his *infinite goodness* being the leading principle in the creation and government of moral agents, it is to the particular investigation of this goodness I mean to confine myself principally, though I shall touch on his other perfections, when by so doing I can throw light upon my subject, which will be divided into three chapters, containing the *Definition, Proofs, and Consequences* of the infinite goodness of God.

CHAP. I.

DEFINITION OF THE INFINITE GOODNESS OF
GOD.

THE infinite goodness of God is, *that constant disposition of his will, by which he determines to bestow upon his creatures as much happiness as their natures are capable of admitting.* And here we must distinguish four things, viz. the *nature*, the *design*, the *duration*, and the *effects* of this divine benevolence. And,

First, In its *nature*, it is an invariable disposition, a constant, unalterable, in a word, an immutable goodness.

Secondly, Its *design*, to confer good, nothing but good, pure from every mixture of evil, and even all possible good ; that is to say, all the good that such a Being can dispense, and that the creature, who is the object of it, can receive.

Thirdly, Its *duration*, which is boundless as eternity; for goodness, to be infinite, must never cease from doing all the good it can, and consequently, in an eternal being, must be exerted eternally.

Fourthly, Its *effects* not only extend to all the intelligent beings of the universe, but even to all the creatures capable of distinguishing between pleasure and pain; for the divine goodness could not be infinite, if it did not embrace his immense family of sentient, as well as rational beings. But I shall here only consider that branch of it which relates to man; because it is to human beings that Scripture calls our attention more particularly, and because it is incomparably more important to comprehend the designs of infinite benevolence towards us, whose duty it is to make suitable returns of love and obedience.

But here an objection may be started, which merits examination. May not all the beings in the universe be so connected in the general scheme of divine government, which embraces all in one compendious whole, as not to permit the separating a part

from the general system, in which infinite wisdom may make one race of beings subservient to the greater, or general good of the rest?

That infinite goodness does, and ought to prefer a general to a particular advantage, I am ready to allow; and therefore, that he can expose one or many of his creatures to a temporary evil, however great, when it is necessary to procure the good of a superior number. This, far from being inconsistent with the proposition I advance, is agreeable to the nature of intelligent creatures, and to the happiness corresponding therewith; as I hope to make it appear, that the sufferings inflicted for the good of others, will, sooner or later, procure an increase of happiness to the individual who endured them, so that in the end he will perceive and acknowledge himself to be a gainer, by having thus contributed to the welfare of others.

But when, by a strange supposition, which has not the least foundation, either in the nature of intelligent beings, or their happiness, we advance, that the infinite or eternal misery, not of a multitude, but even of an individual, must take place to procure

the good of the rest, then it is evident that perfect benevolence can never admit so horrid a method into his plan; because, in so doing, he must commit an act of unjust and partial cruelty----an act barbarous and tyrannical in respect to one creature, in order to procure the happiness of others. No, the Being infinitely good cannot, at the same time, be infinitely cruel; the detestible reason of superior strength is no argument with him; his goodness is true and genuine, consequently impartial and universal. He possesses, in the inexhaustible treasures of his wisdom and power, sufficient sources of felicity for all his creatures, without being reduced to the dreadful expedient of making some the victims of others, or adopting means repugnant to the simplest ideas of goodness, and utterly incongruous with those we ought to entertain of the merciful and kind Parent of the universe, who represents himself to us as tenderly concerned for the happiness of his children, which St Paul calls *the kindness and love of God towards men*, or, as it is rendered in the original, *the philanthropy of God*. Are men miser-

able? it is termed that *infinite compassion* he has for their wretchedness: Are they irregular and vicious? it assumes the titles of *forbearance*, *long-suffering*, and *patience*: But when, by a sincere repentance, they turn from their iniquity, then it is his *clemency*, his *pardon*, his *mercy*, and his *grace*, that is extended towards them.

CHAP. II.

PROOFS OF THE INFINITE GOODNESS OF GOD.

TO the proper demonstrating of this important and fundamental principle, I must establish it on two evident proofs, one drawn from reason, the other from Scripture.

And in doing this I shall shew, that it is impossible to form to ourselves just notions of the adorable goodness of the Governor of the universe, unless we endeavour to know his other perfections. We must therefore consider him, first, as the original cause of all things; and, secondly, deduce from thence his right to the character of the best and most excellent of beings.

If God in the beginning created the heavens and the earth, he must be the original cause of the universe; *a Being existing of himself, from whom all other beings derive existence.* This idea must naturally present

itself, when we ascend from the effect to the cause; and from this definition, which is certainly incontestible, we are led, by a necessary conclusion, to the discovery of all his other perfections. It contains two important ideas; the one relative to the manner of his own independent existence; the other to his agency, as the Creator of all other beings. All the attributes we discover in God must depend on one or other of these ideas, and arise either from his own self-existent nature, or belong to his character as Creator ----it is impossible to separate them: For if God is the spring and fountain of life, he cannot have derived it from any, but, in a word, exists necessarily. The same is true of all his attributes as Creator; such as he is he has ever been; the perfections of his nature are eternal, consequently exist necessarily in him; so that the Supreme Being is, both in his nature and perfections, *eternal, independent, immutable, and infinite*.

First, He is eternal, for having received nothing, he cannot possibly suffer any privation; and as he knew no commencement, he can know no end. *I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the*

Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

Secondly, His absolute independence flows from the same premises, and Scripture every where abounds with the most positive declarations of this truth. *Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him that thou makest thy ways perfect?*

Thirdly, That the Most High is immutable in his being and perfections, is equally evident from his independent nature, which precludes every possibility of change; he is always the same, *the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*

Fourthly, I have advanced that God in his nature and attributes, as our Creator, is infinite, uncircumscribed, unlimited. If his perfections are immutable, and can neither admit of increase or diminution, they are now what they have ever been, and what they will be throughout all eternity, infinite. If he possesses knowledge, it must pervade all things; if power, it must be uncontrouled; if goodness, it must extend to all, and will the greatest and most universal happiness.---

Such are the sublime ideas comprehended in *necessary existence*.

Let us for a moment contemplate this unfathomable, this astonishing Being, who sits supreme, without rival or competitor. To raise our thoughts to him, is to elevate them to the *Being of beings*, the source of existence, or, as he describes himself, the I AM. *Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.* But when we turn our eyes upon his creatures, what do we behold, but a borrowed and contingent existence, which they hold by his grant, which at the moment of their creation depended upon his will, and which every instant is subject to it? Thus their preservation is a continued creation; *for in him we live, and move, and have our being.*

He is eternal, and we are but of yesterday. He is independent; whereas we, and all that surround us, are constantly deriving new supplies from him; exposed to the loss of what we have, and needing new acquisitions. He is immutable, always the same; in him is no succession, no modification, no transition from one condition to another; he is all that he can ever be; whereas his

creatures are mutable, constantly affected by the objects which surround them, and perpetually passing through a variety of situations and circumstances. He is infinite in his essence and attributes as Creator, unconfined by space or time, and fills immensity; the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, and all his glorious and adorable perfections are as uncircumscribed as his essence: Whereas his creatures occupy but a small point in space, and an inconsiderable portion in time; they possess no quality, but in a degree equally limited with their nature; whatever progress they may make towards perfection, by the best improvement of their faculties, to whatever height they may elevate themselves, their knowledge and activity will ever remain confined within narrow bounds, and they will still continue at an infinite distance from him *who fills heaven and earth, before whom the nations are as a drop of the bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance. All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God; or what likeness will ye compare unto him?*

Let us proceed to the second idea contained in this definition, *that God is the origin of existence to all inferior beings* ; and let us examine what perfections must reside in him, as Creator of the universe.

The first attribute that strikes our minds, when we reflect on the production of the world, is *power*. St Paul, speaking of *the invisible things of God which are clearly seen*, calls our attention to *his eternal power*, which in an infinite Being, must of necessity be infinite. But should we not be disposed to admit the force of this argument, there is another more simple, consequently more evident, drawn from the very act of creation. To create, to produce from nothing, to give existence to what was inanimate, demonstrates, without doubt, the highest extent of power, and is the noblest idea we can form of that attribute in our Maker. He who made me, who from nothing caused me to pass into existence, can do in and for me every thing that is consistent with the nature and essence he has conferred upon me. Therefore he is all powerful with respect to me ; this may with equal propriety be said of all the beings that compose the universe, as they

are all creatures of his power. Scripture, when it informs us that *with God all things are possible*, has no term more emphatical by which to express his infinite power; and appeals to creation as its incontestible proof. *He calleth those things which be not, as though they were. By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the hosts of them by the breath of his mouth. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast. He said, Let there be light, and there was light.*

Nor can we admit the irresistible and uncontrollable power of the Creator, without acknowledging, at the same time, that it is not a blind principle, which produces its effect in a manner merely physical. The smallest attention to the beings which compose the world, is sufficient to discover indications of *wisdom* and *design*. Besides, when we behold it peopled with intelligent creatures, distinguished by knowledge and design, must it not appear from thence, that he who made them possesses these qualities in a much more eminent and superior degree? *Understand, ye brutish among the people: he*

that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know? Whence it follows, that the divine mind is infinitely *intelligent*, or endowed with understanding and will. His knowledge extends to all creatures. He sees at one glance all causes, and every subsequent effect capable of resulting from them throughout all eternity; he contemplates, by a single act, that immense chain of consequences that comprise all periods, past, present, and future. Let us attend to the language of Scripture on this astonishing subject. *Great is the Lord, his understanding is infinite. There is no searching of his understanding. The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imagination of the thoughts. I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times, the things that are not yet done. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world: Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. God is light, and in him is no darkness.*

From the omniscience of God, we are led to infer his infinite wisdom, which consists in *constantly proposing the best and most excellent end, and employing the most proper and efficacious means to obtain it.* Thus his will being ever directed by his supreme wisdom, can never, in any possible case, degenerate into fancy or caprice. All his proceedings are the dictates and counsels of his eternal wisdom. The Lord of hosts is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working---the only wise God; because every subordinate degree of wisdom that created intelligences may possess, bears no greater proportion to the fountain of knowledge, than a feeble spark to a conflagrated world. Well, therefore, might the inspired Apostle exclaim, when contemplating this amazing subject, *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*

Having shewn the infinite power and wisdom of the Creator of the universe, I come to the consideration of his boundless goodness. Nor will it be difficult to establish this interesting proposition from the theory already laid down: For if his wis-

dom in designing is a perfect security from that versatility which arises from ignorance or caprice, it is evident he can never sport with the happiness of his creatures, and that when he determined to create them, he was actuated by some motive worthy of himself. Now, his own advantage, or that of his creatures, must have been the end in view. And is it possible that a necessary-existent, immutable, and infinite Being, who is all-sufficient, consequently totally disinterested in all he does, could propose any benefit to himself, or be influenced by any thing but the Godlike satisfaction of opening the sources of bliss, and dispensing to his creatures that felicity, those rivers of pleasure which flow at his right hand for evermore? He knows what perfect happiness is, and the method of conferring it best adapted to the nature of his creatures.---- Thus the voice of reason loudly proclaims, That our Creator is our Father, a Father whose love is infinite, because his goodness is unalterable.

PROOFS OF THE INFINITE GOODNESS OF GOD,
TAKEN FROM SCRIPTURE.

SCRIPTURE here opens a rich and abundant field for our contemplation ; no subject is treated more repeatedly or emphatically than that of divine goodness. The Supreme Being is there represented as our Father---
Doubtless thou art our Father ; though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not, thou, O Lord, art our Father : And it is by this tender appellation that our Saviour encourages us to address him, when he says, *After this manner pray ye ; Our Father, &c.* He is styled *Father of mercies---the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.* The strongest and most lively images are employed to represent this disposition of God towards us--*the riches of his goodness and forbearance, the tender mercies of our God ;* and an apostle, writing to the Ephesians, prays, *that they being rooted and grounded in love, maybe able to comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height thereof.*

But as it is not possible to select here all the passages of Scripture that relate to this subject, I shall confine my observations to three, which have always appeared to me expressive of peculiar energy. The first is that in Isaiah, where God, by the mouth of his prophet, expostulates with and comforts his people. *Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, she may forget, yet will I not forget thee.* The love of a woman for her infant is the strongest and most constant attachment we can conceive, I might say the most universal: For where is the animal, however weak and timid on other occasions, that has not courage to defend its young? and do we not, with aversion and horror, consider as a monster a mother who, by any other passion, has stifled this sentiment of nature? But rare as these examples are, we are sometimes called to behold them. *They may forget, yet will not I.* His love is then superior to the strongest examples of it among men; it is constant, it is infinite. Well then might the Psalmist declare, with

an unshaken confidence, *When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.*

The second passage alluded to, is that in which our Saviour ascribes goodness, in the superlative degree, to God alone. *And behold one came and said to him, Good master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God.* Here the only begotten Son of God, the Saviour of the world, refuses to be called good, and expressly declares that title to belong to God alone. Are we then to conclude, from these remarkable words, that there is no such thing as goodness among men; that parents have no love for their children; and, above all, that our blessed Redeemer was destitute of goodness, and had no love for us? It cannot be taken by any one in this sense: For had the Supreme Creator endowed us with a nature averse to the exercise of this celestial virtue, would he ever have made it our duty, or proposed himself as an example for our imitation, commanding us to be merciful, as our Father in heaven is merciful? And does he

not condescend to borrow allusions from the tender tie of paternal affections, whereby to express his own benevolent dispositions? *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.* From whence it equally follows, that the love of parents for their offspring is not void of all goodness. But if we admit this, how much more readily must we acknowledge, that the Saviour of the world, he who though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich, was possessed of goodness in an eminent degree? Yet it is the same Jesus, whose love surpasseth knowledge, that says, *Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God.* What then must have been his meaning; what the sense of these sublime words? Manifestly this; that the goodness of God being absolutely infinite, unlimited, and unbounded, can never be compared with the same quality in his creatures, how excellent soever they may be, because finite can bear no proportion to infinite. It is true, that the goodness and the wisdom of God may reside in his creatures in a limited degree, as they are communicable perfections; but

to possess these attributes infinitely belongs to God alone, and is the exclusive privilege of a necessarily-existent being. He is called the only wise God, in the same sense in which our Saviour declares that he alone is good.

The third quotation I have in view, are those words of the disciple whom Jesus loved, and whose writings breathe so much of the spirit of his divine master, *He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love*. Sublime, affecting character! Love and goodness are then the essence of his will, the motives of all his actions, on which we may with safety repose the dearest interests of our souls! With respect to his divine intelligence, *God is light, and in him is no darkness*, no ignorance, no error; and in respect to his will, he is pure and infinite love, without any mixture of malevolence.

If we admit this representation of the character and dispositions of God towards us, we cannot suppose hatred to reside in his nature; because, to say that love hates, is a contradiction in terms. The author of the Book of Wisdom, whoever he was, speaking of the Supreme Being, describes

him in a manner too 'exalted, and at the same time too just, to be overlooked. Speaking of that mercy which he had upon all, that they should amend, he says, *For thou lovest all the things that are, and abhorrest nothing which thou hast made ; for never wouldst thou have made any thing, if thou hadst hated it.*

Thus, if we have any knowledge of God, of his character and dispositions towards us, we must acknowledge that his love is the grand spring of all he has done, or ever will do for us. If we refuse to admit this, St John tells us, that we have not known him, for God is love ; and that this amiable disposition alone, which enables us to see him as he is, can entitle us to any resemblance to him.

Though we have just been contemplating some of the most striking expressions of divine benevolence, yet as it is a truth upon which all religion is founded, so interesting in its nature, and so repeatedly urged both in the Old and New Testament, I shall not fear to incur the displeasure of my reader, by detaining him a few moments longer on this delightful subject.

What I would farther propose on this head, is taken from the gospel dispensation, which discovers the good will of God to men, his paternal designs, and, in a word, their glorious destination to perfect and everlasting felicity. This is clearly expressed by the Apostle, who says, *that the living God is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe; and will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth.* Such are the declarations of his will, who is called the Saviour of all men, and whose designs, purposes, and resolutions cannot fail, because infinite wisdom sees the best means to accomplish them, and infinite power enables him to employ them; thus it is impossible his determinations should be subverted. But had we not this argument drawn from his divine perfections, we should still have the positive assurances of Scripture, that *the counsel of the Lord endureth for ever---my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure,* says the supreme Jehovah, by the mouth of his prophet Isaiah; in a word, it is him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. Such is the immutability of his counsel; and constancy

and immutability form the first characters of infinite goodness.

The effect of this divine benevolence, the happy consequence that mortals are to derive from it, is salvation---perfect and universal salvation; for this is his will, when he calls himself the Saviour of all men. Now, salvation is that life, that celestial happiness, which the Author of life and fountain of felicity has prepared for his creatures, and to which he will raise them all. This immortal and unutterable bliss, so worthy of him to bestow, and of us to aspire to, will consist in the perfection of our souls in knowledge and holiness, and that of our bodies being raised incorruptible and glorious; in the magnificent abode and delightful society of angels and of the spirits of just men made perfect; in our communion with the Son of God, our gracious Redeemer; and, finally, in our admission to the beatific vision of the Supreme Being, who will unite us to himself, and make us partakers of his nature and happiness, so that God will be all in all. And can we form to ourselves the idea of greater happiness? are our natures susceptible of more perfect, more ex-

alted felicity, than that of which God himself will be the immediate and inexhaustible source?

This is the short, but delightful sketch, of this salvation which is to be our inheritance, the possession to which God, by our Lord Jesus Christ, has appointed us, and which, as it is prepared for us by him, must comprehend all desirable good.---Did I say, desirable? it must contain *exceeding and abundantly more than we are able to ask or think*; all the felicity of which our natures are susceptible, and which a Being infinitely powerful can confer upon us---in a word, all that is possible. This comprehends the second character of infinite goodness, viz. *a disposition to do all possible good*.

We come next to consider *the duration of infinite goodness*, which is throughout all eternity. Thus the salvation he confers upon us must be an eternal salvation---a life everlasting---an immortality---an eternal inheritance---an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us---an incorruptible crown; in a word, those things which are not seen, and

which are eternal; whereas, the things which are seen are temporal. If, then, our heavenly Father has reserved an eternal salvation for us, in the treasures of his munificence, he will for ever bestow upon us all possible good, because *his goodness endureth for ever*: And thus we are come to the third character in infinite goodness.

The fourth and last, is, that it is *a disposition eternally to confer all possible good on all mankind, without exception*. The passages above cited are full of the plainest and most positive declarations of this truth; it is the language of revelation in almost every page, *that the Lord is good unto all, and that his tender mercies are over all his works*.

Thus I have proved that the doctrine of Scripture, with respect to our future destination, evidently demonstrates that the goodness of God is indeed infinite, as I have distinctly shewn from the declaration of it as his will, that all men should be saved; which necessarily implies all the characters of infinite goodness, and is perfectly equivalent with this proposition, *That there is, in the Supreme Being, a constant will to confer all possible good upon all mankind, throughout all e-*

ternity. And does not this exactly correspond with the definition of infinite goodness, which I gave in the preceding chapter?

Such has the Father of our spirits revealed himself to us in his word. But he has yet another method of instruction, more sensible, more evident, and more universal, than the most perfect doctrine could ever be; and this is our experience. Experience, when joined to that revelation which enlightens our reason, places this truth in so striking a light, that it becomes as it were palpable, and is an object of our senses.

Thus, when revelation proclaims the promise of eternal life, in which the treasures of divine munificence are displayed, it also appeals to a fact---to the most signal instance of infinite goodness, in the gift, the precious gift that God has bestowed upon us in his Son, to call and to conduct us to happiness; that our faith being founded on experience, may lead us to place an unshaken confidence in all his assurances of salvation.

Now, as this fact is appealed to in proof

of the infinite goodness of our Maker, let us examine how it is evidenced by it.

The supreme Creator, beholding the beings he had made and destined to happiness, wandering in the ways of sin, and departing from that celestial life, for the enjoyment of which they were created, appointed his own Son to be the Saviour of the world. And could the eternal Father bestow on us a more excellent gift than he who is the image of his own invisible Godhead, the first born of every creature, by whom the world was made---his first born---his only begotten---his well beloved son, in whom he declares himself well pleased, who was crowned with glory and happiness, in the bosom of the Father, before the world was?

But when he appointed this beloved Son to be the deliverer of the human race, to the accomplishing this end, and the fulfilling of this divine commission, he gave him power over all men; power to raise them from the dead, and to judge them, and authority to reign over them, that he might bring them all to God.

But previous to the exercise of this mediatorial authority, it was necessary that he

should become the light of the world ; and not only instruct us by his precepts, but shew us, in his person, what those virtues were which we were enjoined to practise, in order to fit ourselves for the enjoyment of this great salvation. He was therefore not only appointed to be the teacher and deliverer, but the model and guide of the human race.

To this end the Son of God became the Son of man, emptied himself, and became like to us, by taking, with our mortal nature, all its infirmities and miseries, and submitting to death, that by his resurrection and ascension to heaven, the glorious certainty of our future destination might appear.

Now, to accomplish this, it was necessary that the Divine Being should give his well beloved Son to a sinful world ; that he should not spare him, but should deliver him up. Thus we behold our Saviour, in conformity to the will of his Father, quitting the celestial abode of divine glory, condescending to be born of a virgin, living amongst us in a mean and abject condition,

exposed to contradictions, to hatred, and to all the cruel malice of his enemies ; becoming a prey to their machinations, abandoned to their barbarous rage, placed in the rank of a criminal, loaded with reproach and indignity, and condemned to the most bitter sufferings, nailed to an infamous cross, and there expiring in grief and agony And is it thus, O God of justice, that thou permittest thine innocent and holy Son to become the victim of a wicked and corrupt world, a world of finners, of unjust and cruel rebels ! *O the depth of the riches of the goodness and love of God ! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out.*

Such is the gift which God has bestowed upon us in his Son ; such the striking and ever memorable act, by which he has signalized his infinite goodness to us. And what goodness may we not discover, what evidence may we not draw from it ? Two reflections certainly merit our attention.

First, Which way soever we turn our thoughts on this astonishing subject, we behold the traces of infinite goodness ; and not the traces only, but the most resplen-

dent and convincing marks of this amiable, this adorable attribute, in the great Author of our being. His gift was that of the most excellent, the most sublime intelligence, and therefore the most tender object of his affection. He gave him in a manner not less surprising---he spared him not, but delivered him up to die upon an ignominious cross. If we next consider on whom he conferred so transcendent a favour, it was on a whole race of men, alienated from him, and enemies in their minds by wicked works. Or if we turn to the purposes for which he gave him, we shall discover that he was designed to exhibit, even in his death, the most perfect model of all virtue; and that the consequences of that death were to be our glorious destination to a happy and eternal life. Need we then doubt that our salvation is his will, and our happiness his delight, when he employs such means to secure it? And after this wonderful token of his love, with what confidence may we not depend that we shall for ever remain the happy objects of his infinite compassion and love, and that he will deny us nothing that can contribute to our everlasting well-being? Such

is the conclusion which St Paul derives from this marvellous dispensation---*He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

Thus does experience discover to us the infinite love of our Maker; and how evident soever truths founded on reason may appear, the instruction we receive from experience brings home to our hearts such strong and lively impressions, that we are unable to resist the conviction.

The most positive declarations, the most immediate promises, from the mouth of God himself, that he will never leave nor forsake us, may put tranquillity into our minds, because they are the declarations of him who is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent; yet even these, were we destitute of all experience of their truth, could never create in our hearts the intimate conviction, the perfect assurance, which only that can give.

For could I ever, from these declarations and promises, have inferred the ineffable gift of such a Saviour, I might indeed have hoped, from the principles already establish-

ed, that my Almighty Father would refuse me nothing which he saw necessary to my happiness; but who could presume to expect such things as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard? surely they could never enter into the heart of man to conceive.

But when to the express assurances, to the most magnificent promises of divine goodness, we are able to add that evident demonstration which arises from the experience of the infinite goodness of God in the gift of his Son, what strength doth it not convey to them? a flood of light pours in upon the mind; the whole man lays hold of the delightful truth by every faculty of his soul; he not only knows, comprehends, and believes it; but he sees, contemplates, tastes, and, in a word, feels in the inmost recesses of his heart, that his eternal Creator is a father infinitely kind.

It is thus we may be filled with all the fulness of God. It was this consideration which led St Paul to express himself with such heart-felt eloquence, and such strength and energy of language----*I am persuaded, says he, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things*

present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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CHAP. III.

CONSEQUENCES DEDUCED FROM THE INFINITE
GOODNESS OF GOD.

AFTER having, in the two preceding chapters, explained and proved the infinite goodness of God, it should seem that this foundation of the system of his government of moral agents was sufficiently known, and that I might here terminate the first part of this work. But this sublime and delightful proposition is a truth too interesting, to content myself with having demonstrated it; we must stop and contemplate the most affecting object that can ever engage our attention----the Being who made us, and who is goodness itself; the Eternal Will, who is love, and breathes nothing but love! If the Psalmist said, *It is a good thing, O Most High, to shew forth thy loving kindness every morning*; how much reason have we to say,

It is a good thing to contemplate, to meditate, to reflect upon this ineffable goodness? Our minds no sooner employ themselves thus, but our hearts are touched and penetrated, and we are ready to exclaim, O God of love, in thy presence is fulness of joy!

But it is not only the beauty of the subject that detains me; I have another and more important reason, which makes it necessary that I should dwell upon it; and this is, that the infinite goodness of God is not known; or, what amounts to the same, that it is ill known. I say, that *to know improperly*, or *not to know*, amounts to the same thing. St John does not say, *He that loveth not has improperly known God*; but, *He that loveth not has not known him*.

And here I perceive that many of my readers will be alarmed at the apparent injustice of the accusation, and ask how this complaint can be made among Christians, when there is not a sect, a single communion amongst them, which does not profess to believe the infinite goodness of God? Is there a divine, of what denomination soever, who does not acknowledge and expressly teach this truth? Is there even an indivi-

dual in Christendom who does not profess it, insomuch that the epithet of a *good God* is in the mouth of every one? To all this I agree; mankind acknowledge and profess to believe the infinite goodness of God; it is preached, it is taught, and notwithstanding all this it is not known.

But it is necessary here to explain what I advance, not only to make the propriety of this chapter appear, but of the whole of this treatise: For why write to explain and establish a truth already known to all, and which no one contests?

I say then, *first*, that the goodness of God is not known to all such as attribute to him a will and actions absolutely incompatible therewith, and which can only belong to infinite malevolence and cruelty.

Secondly, It is not known to those who have doubts, difficulties, and objections concerning it.

Thirdly, It is not known to all such as have not, for the Supreme Being, for his Providence, and for his laws, the sentiments which infinite goodness deserves; for his providence and his laws are no other than his perfect and gracious will.

And when tried by these rules, how many will be found who know thee not, O merciful God ! How many labour under the dreadful misfortune of misconceiving thy adorable goodness, through the means of prejudice, ignorance, or passion ! Lord lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon them.

Since such is the case, it was necessary to determine the precise idea, and to demonstrate the perfect certainty of this truth, as I have done hitherto ; but this is not enough ; I therefore devote this chapter to the enumeration of the principal consequences which flow from the infinite goodness of God, which will, in the *first* place, entirely refine it from the dross of error, which has corrupted, and even totally destroyed our ideas of it.

Secondly, Reconcile it with every appearance, with every event in the course of nature, with every dispensation of Providence, which may seem in contradiction to it.

Thirdly, Shew what are the sentiments which the knowledge of the infinite goodness of God infallibly produces in the heart, when the mind is rightly informed, and thoroughly convinced of it.

This chapter will be divided into two sections, the first of which will contain the consequences respecting the theory; and the second, the practical consequences to be derived from it.

SECT. I.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE INFINITE GOODNESS OF GOD.

THE *first* consequence resulting from the infinite goodness of God, is its *incomprehensibility*; or, in other words, the utter impossibility of any finite creature ever comprehending the extent of this attribute as possessed by the Supreme Being.

And this must appear with the clearest evidence; for as this perfection is constantly employed in doing all the good that is possible, we must, in order to comprehend it, know all the good which every creature is, and ever will be capable of receiving;

we must be ignorant of none of the works of our Maker, must know the whole universe as he does, must know God himself; and this is to advance, that our knowledge must be infinite. Thus it is evident, that the infinite goodness of God is incomprehensible by us, because we can never possess infinite knowledge.

Besides, we see that this attribute is connected with his wisdom and power; thus, when we say that his goodness is incomprehensible, it is equal to saying, that all the attributes of our Creator are infinite, and that he himself far exceeds the limits of our understanding.---*Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is high as heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know?*

But here some will say, If the goodness of God is incomprehensible to us, because it is infinite, have we not just reason to fear that all researches into it will be vain, and all our arguments uncertain conjectures? Shall the limited powers of man, his weak and short-sighted reason, presume to advance any thing on a subject so dark and

impenetrable ; and must not all the arguments of his feeble reason be uncertain and rash, if not absolutely false ; how then are we to argue on an incomprehensible subject ?

Such are the declamations I have often heard, and sometimes even read : For when men will not admit the consequences that follow from the infinite goodness of their Maker, they think to avoid them by taking refuge in its unsearchable nature, and declaim on the darkness, the weakness, and temerity of human reason.

Let us for a moment examine what that faculty is which we hear so often censured. It is true, that it is originally covered with profound darkness ; but it is also true, that it is the mean by which we may acquire light, and that in an endless progression. It is true, that in its first dawn it is weak and feeble ; but it is not less so, that it acquires strength by exercise, and that the more it is exerted the more vigorous it becomes. Thus reason, however obscure and feeble in its origin, is nevertheless the grand mark of distinction between us and the brute crea-

tion; it is the faculty by which we are rendered capable of contemplating and resembling, in any degree, the infinitely perfect God; in a word, therein can only consist his image stamped upon man. Reason is the excellence, the perfection, the dignity of human nature, and God addresses himself to it in nature and in revelation. He that made us for happiness, determined to raise us from the wretchedness of ignorance and sin, to perfection and felicity; and to accomplish this end, he gives us the means of developing, of exercising, of fortifying, and of enlightning it, by the knowledge of truth. Ah! let us then venerate our reason. Let us beware of vilifying and degrading this candle of the Lord, in which consists the honour and glory of our nature. Let us fear to follow our prejudices and passions, since it is they that render us culpable and wretched; and let us remember that we shall never be perfect and happy, till our reason shall have acquired an absolute and habitual empire over our sentiments and conduct; that is, till we are truly rational.

I solicit my readers to pardon this digression in favour of human reason, which I consider necessary, since, under the pretext that the goodness of God is incomprehensible, the ignorance and weakness of reason have been exaggerated to such a degree, that some might be tempted to infer, that it was a treacherous and dangerous guide. It was therefore requisite to explain how far it might be deemed weak and imperfect, without prejudice to the excellence and dignity of this valuable faculty.

Let us now take up the question, How are we to reason on an incomprehensible subject? Now, when we say that the divine goodness is unsearchable, we do not mean that the subject is so dark and impenetrable that we can form no ideas of it; that we cannot comprehend what goodness is; and that we do not perceive, with the clearest evidence, that the Supreme Being is infinitely good. This would be a very false and absurd conclusion, and what the two preceding chapters are intended to overthrow; we mean therefore to express, that in the extent of divine goodness there is, and will ever remain, infinitely more than

we can comprehend, and that the sublimest ideas we can form will therefore continue at an infinite distance from the reality of that attribute in our Maker. We mean also to signify, that we can never ascribe more goodness to God than he possesses, or exceed its bounds in our expectations of happiness from it. We cannot, indeed, determine the time and manner in which infinite wisdom may see fit to dispense his blessings, because our knowledge is finite; but we may with certainty affirm, with the Apostle, *that he is able to do exceedingly and abundantly more for us than we can ask or think.*

Lastly, when we say that the infinite goodness of God is incomprehensible, we mean that it is inexhaustible with respect to us, and that our progress in the knowledge of it will last for ever; for in the riches of his love consist those rivers of pleasure of which he will cause us to drink. This is the true and interesting signification of the term and first consequence, *that the infinite goodness of God is incomprehensible.*

The second contains the absolute impossibility of there being any thing in the Supreme Mind contrary to his infinite goodness. This

truth is so apparent, that many of my readers may call it a self-evident proposition ; as if I were to say, that it is impossible for a thing to be and not to be at the same time. And yet evident as it certainly is, its discussion is both important and necessary, and will take up a considerable portion of this chapter. For,

Though mankind admit the infinite goodness of God, they nevertheless obstinately persist in attributing to him designs and actions absolutely incompatible with its very nature, and which can only belong to infinite cruelty. To give colour to this, it was necessary to seek in God certain qualities and attributes, which might serve as a foundation for such a will, and for such actions. Thus they have laid hold on his incomprehensibility, which they apply to his goodness, in such a manner as forbids any conclusions to be drawn without temerity. But I have already combated this sophistical reasoning. They have also opposed to the goodness of God his *liberty*, by which he is free to do or not to do good ; that is, free to be or not to be good. They have found his *holiness*, by which he holds the

wicked in such abomination, that instead of being the objects of his goodness and love, they are the unhappy victims of his displeasure and hatred. They have discovered the *justice* of God, that *punitive justice*, as they call it, which has such a decided superiority over his goodness, though both are infinite, that it obliges him to inflict on the wicked a punishment infinite in duration. They have defined the *authority* of God to be an absolute right in him to dispose of his creatures at his pleasure, without any regard to their happiness, and consequently without consulting his goodness. His *majesty*, also, by which they have determined the minutest sin to deserve infinite punishment, because committed against infinite majesty. They have found his *glory* to be the supreme end for which all things were created, and which he will display in the infinite misery of the reprobate, in direct opposition to his infinite goodness.

Consider how many things have been found in God, which are contrary to his goodness, since they prevent its exertion! how many formidable barriers are raised to stop the current of divine benignity in its

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eternal course! May we not with reason apprehend, lest the sentiments arising from its influence upon our hearts should entirely escape us? But those who have perused the preceding chapter, have already seen on what firm foundations divine benevolence stands. I proceed, therefore, to shew, with all imaginable evidence, *That it is absolutely impossible that there should exist any thing in God, contrary to his infinite goodness.*

How then, may it be said, will you, in order to vindicate the goodness of God, assert that he is neither *free*, nor *holy*, nor *just*; that he possesses neither *authority*, nor *majesty*, nor *glory*?

On the contrary, I shall prove that these are so many divine attributes, which he possesses in an infinitely perfect measure, because he is infinitely good; and thus, that his other perfections, instead of opposing, agree and conspire eternally to shed happiness and perfection throughout the universe.

But before I examine these perfections separately, it will be proper just to cast an eye back upon our second consequence, which asserts, *the impossibility of there being in God*

any thing in contradiction to his infinite goodness, and to discover why this is impossible.

Because it is impossible that the same being can be infinitely good and infinitely evil : For as all the attributes of the Deity are infinite, that which is opposed to good, being evil, must be infinite evil ; and this surely is as impossible as it is horrid and blasphemous.

Now the grand use, the consequence of this important truth, is the assurance it gives me, that whatever aspect present appearances may wear, nothing can exist in God contrary to his goodness. Subtle and abstract metaphysical questions on the liberty, the holiness, the justice, the authority, the majesty, and glory of God, may embarrass me for a while, but they will never shake this capital, this fundamental truth ; and I shall answer them, as the blind man did the Pharisees concerning Jesus, when they said, *Give God the praise ; we know that this man is a sinner. He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or not, I know not ; one thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see.*

But let us see what these perfections are that are supposed to differ from goodness,

As creator and governor of the world, the Deity can exert but three perfections, knowledge, goodness, and power. By his infinite wisdom he can always distinguish what is best to be done ; his infinite goodness will ever lead him to prefer the greatest good ; and his power will enable him to execute his will. From whence it follows, that the rest of his perfections, though they bear different names, can be only branches of some one of these, or the result of their diverse combinations ; and that in either of these cases, there can be nothing in God adverse to his infinite goodness.

And first let us consider divine *liberty*, which is a negative perfection, consisting in *a perfect exemption from all constraint, whether external or internal*. In consequence of this liberty, God may be said to do whatsoever he wills, and he wills whatever is best : Thus, being exempt from all constraint, from internal or external causes, he is independent, and his actions are the result of his choice. Many are the declarations of Scripture expressive of this divine liberty.----

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Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven and in earth.---My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure, saith the Lord. ---He executeth all things after the counsel of his own will---for who hath resisted his will?

But, *secondly*, If such is the perfect liberty of God, how can it stand opposed to his goodness? alas! only by supposing it what it is not, nor ever can be: For under pretence of exalting the liberty of God, he is supposed free to determine for or against, in the affirmative or the negative. independent of the motives which his infinite wisdom may present; and free to will or not to will, or even---shall I venture to complete this horrid proposition?---or even to will, with equal indifference, good or evil. And is this then the infinite liberty of our Creator? Would it, in your estimation, be an amiable and glorious perfection, equally to will the happiness or misery of his creatures; indiscriminately to love or hate them; and to decide indifferently for good or evil? and is it possible that prejudice can so far blind many whose minds are, in other respects, intelligent and upright? But alas! such is its baneful influence. The necessity of de-

sending a doctrine which they venerate, however horrid, because they believe it revealed in the word of God---this necessity leads men to hold a language the sense of which is revolting, contrary to the natural dictates of their hearts; and which they have, in a thousand instances, contradicted, when they only meant to express the simple and natural ideas of the adorable goodness of the Lord.

But let us turn from this dreadful phantom, raised by ignorance and prejudice, and consider the liberty of the divine will as the determinations of design and choice, from motives worthy of him, and which his infinite wisdom can never be at a loss to suggest. Thence his infinite goodness must remain unalterably and immutably the same throughout endless ages. His essence is goodness and love, he cannot act contrary to his nature, or deny himself.

Let us reject with horror all such erroneous opinions of divine liberty as destroy every idea of his goodness; and let us resolve it into that absolute prerogative which God alone can possess, of executing every

purpose of his will, without constraint from external or internal causes. This is perfect and infinite liberty; a liberty which, far from opposing goodness, will ensure its eternal exercise.

The holiness of God, far from being adverse to his goodness, is itself a capital branch resulting from it.

The word *holiness* is made use of in Scripture to express the moral perfection of an intelligent nature; and all will allow that excellence to consist in the perfection of the will. Thus is the Supreme Being called *thrice holy*, because his will is sovereignly good and perfect. Now this perfect holiness of God, evidently results from his perfect goodness already established. I shall not therefore go over these proofs again, but conclude, that if holiness consists in the perfection of the will, the Supreme Being must be most holy, because he is infinitely good.

Such is the holiness of God with respect to himself; view it in relation to his creatures, it consists in a disposition invariably to will their moral perfection; or, in other words, to desire the greatest perfection of

our wills. In conformity to this, he commands us to love him with all our hearts, who is supremely perfect, and to love our neighbour as ourselves, to the end that our will may partake of that perfection which resides invariably in his. This is the summary of all the divine laws which he requires us to obey, because he wills our utmost perfection. Agreeable to this he declares, that *his will is our sanctification*. He commands us to tend towards perfection; to be pure, as he is pure; holy, as he is holy; perfect, as he is perfect; merciful, as he is merciful;---in a word, to be imitators of him as dear children.

From this disposition in the Deity to advance the moral perfection of his creatures, must result his hatred to moral evil. Sin is that will in us which is in opposition to the law, and contrary to the love of God and our neighbour; it is the imperfection, the depravity, the wickedness of our wills. As surely, then, as God by his holiness desires the perfection of our wills, so surely must he condemn and detest in us the impurity of vice; he hates it with a perfect hatred, he

has it in abomination, he is its implacable enemy, and he will pursue and combat it as long as we are infected by it. He declares that *nothing unclean shall enter into his holy city*---that *without holiness no one shall see the Lord*---that *he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*---and that *there is no peace to the wicked*.

Such is the nature of divine holiness as it relates to us. The Psalmist had the same idea when he said, *Thou, Lord, lovest righteousness, and hatest iniquity*. Thence the frequent exhortations in Scripture to hate and fly from evil, to love and to do good. Thus far all mankind are agreed, and no one will deny this to be a just idea of the holiness of the Deity.

But here begins the distinction. Those who oppose holiness to goodness, by their definition make it so formidable an obstacle, that, infinite as that goodness is, it becomes checked and conquered: For, under pretext that the holiness of God consists in an infinite hatred of sin, they draw this horrid conclusion, that he hates the obstinate and wicked offender with an infinite and implacable hatred; such a hatred as will, by its

effects, consign them over to infinite and eternal misery.

How injurious to the holiness of the Almighty Being is an idea so contrary to goodness, which converts holiness into cruelty. But if the object is painful, it is happy to reflect with what ease it may be removed, to give place to that more just and comforting idea, that the infinite and implacable hatred of God to sin, proceeds from his infinite love of the sinner; thus he is infinitely holy, because infinitely good; and thus is his holiness a branch of his divine and infinite goodness.

The opinion I am about to combat, that *God hates the wicked*, is as universal as it is pernicious and revolting. We are naturally inclined to the belief in which we are educated; and one of the first ideas the infant mind receives, is that of eternal sufferings, which divine vengeance will inflict on the wicked. When our understandings, though naturally just and consistent, have once admitted this proposition as an indisputable truth, it is natural that we should see in the Supreme Being an infinite hatred to the sinner, because it is a hatred for ever

implacable. We next proceed to search for the reason on which this implacable hatred is founded, and conclude it must arise from the infinite holiness of our Maker. And no sooner do we admit this strange proposition, than it leads us imperceptibly to associate the most opposite and most incompatible ideas; and thus we reason:---It is true that God is infinitely good; but it is not less true that he is infinitely holy; and thence arises that hatred and detestation of sinners, which will end in his inflicting eternal torments upon them. Thus does the introduction of one error corrupt and pervert the most sublime truths, and place the adorable perfections of the Deity in opposition with each other, by asserting, that a being supremely good, will nevertheless deal with his offending creatures as if he were infinitely cruel. Behold the deplorable effects of prejudice! but above all, see whether it leads; how *deep calleth unto deep*, and how one error draws after it a multitude of others. Our reason no sooner deviates from the right way, by the admission of a false principle, than every step it takes

leads farther from the knowledge of the truth. *

* An attentive consideration of the holiness of God, is sufficient to overthrow the doctrine of endless punishment. It is universally held, by the supporters of that doctrine in this country, that the wicked continue to sin in hell, and even become more corrupt, in proportion as their sufferings are prolonged. What reason shall we assign for this?—Surely not want of power in God to destroy the works of the devil.—It must then follow, that he is unwilling. What a picture of that Being who cannot look upon sin but with detestation and abhorrence! It is no satisfactory answer to this objection, to alledge that the wicked are excluded from the divine presence, and unable to disturb the felicity of the righteous: For as God is omnipresent, while sin continues in any part of the universe, it must be equally present to him as when the standard of rebellion was erected in heaven—*If I make my bed in hell, says the Psalmist, lo thou art there.* Nor can the inmost recesses of the human heart conceal sin from his sight who is the searcher of hearts.

Neither is the objection removed, by the wicked being rendered incapable of injuring the righteous: For the malignity of sin consists in its opposition to the divine will, and must therefore be equally displeasing to God wherever it exists;—whether it is displayed by the malice, oppression, fraud, and injustice, of mankind on earth; or by the supposed blasphemies of the damned in hell. The unavoidable consequence of holding the doctrine of endless punish-

But farther.---Those who make the holiness of God to consist in his hatred, of the sinner, have another method of establishing their theory. They produce from Scripture many passages in proof of it : Thus the Psalmist says, *Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity---the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man* ; and Jehovah, speaking by the mouth of Moses, declared, if the Israelites were disobedient, *his soul would abhor them*. And again, by the prophet Jeremiah, *My heritage crieth out against me, therefore have I hated it*.

As these quotations are taken from Scripture, they will afford us a very useful and interesting discussion on what the divine oracles relate respecting the sentiments of

ment therefore must be, either that the Most High delights in the sinning, as well as in the suffering, of a very large proportion of his rational offspring ; or else, that he is unable to effect the destruction of moral evil. If the first, the holiness of God is denied ; if the last, his power is overcome. Either consequence, it is hoped, is too shocking, not to deter the pious inquirer after truth from receiving, or continuing in the doctrine, with which it is inseparably connected.—*Edit.*

God towards finners; and this will greatly contribute to confirm what I have already advanced on the subject of infinite holiness, and farther serve as an illustrious example of that great truth contained in my preliminary discourse, that *God in his word addresses himself to our reason.*

Since Scripture declares, that *God hates the wicked*, there must be a sense in which it can be asserted with truth; but that sense must also perfectly agree with his infinite love for them, or the divine word would be in contradiction with itself and with reason, and thereby lose the evidence of its authenticity as the word of God. I shall therefore proceed to shew, with all imaginable evidence, and to prove from Scripture, *that there is one sense in which he may be said to hate sinners, though there is another in which it is true that he loves them infinitely*; or even, that it is true in one sense that God has an infinite hatred to the wicked, because in another sense he loves them infinitely.

In Scripture, as well as in the use of familiar language, the terms *love* and *hate* have two different meanings annexed to

them ; by one of these meanings, which must always relate to objects, and never to things, to love or to hate any one, signifies sincerely to desire or will their happiness, or their misery. In this sense it is not necessary, in order to our being beloved, that we should be in a state of actual perfection, but only, that we should be capable of a progress towards it ; for then our natures are at least amiable. In this sense it is that the Supreme Being loves the whole race of men without any exception or difference. He desires eternally and invariably their greatest good, and in this sense *hateth nothing that he hath made*, because he can never will the final and eternal misery of any creature. But if the reader is not convinced of this, let him turn to the preceding chapter, where I have demonstrated the infinity of divine goodness.

But the terms *love* and *hate* have yet another sense applied to them, which relates indifferently to persons and things ; and in this sense, to love any one, is to take pleasure in him as in an object that is amiable and agreeable, in whose society and intercourse we take delight. To hate also, in

this sense, is to be displeased with the object, to regard it as odious, and to feel in its society nothing but aversion and disgust. In this sense also it may be justly said of the Supreme Being, that he loves the righteous, and hates the wicked. He beholds in the upright that attachment to virtue, that sincere and universal conformity of their wills to his, which is so pleasing in his sight; and in consequence of this virtue, this sincerity, this submission, he loves them with complacency and delight. On the contrary, he beholds in the wicked their vicious courses, their constant and obstinate opposition to his will, their propensity to moral disorder, and that resistance to his government which is so odious in his sight, and hates them with a hatred of condemnation and aversion. Thus he delights in conferring the tokens of his favour and approbation on the one; while the other will experience the effects of his displeasure in his rigour and severity. *For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.*

After the exposition here given of the two different senses applied to the terms *love* and *hate*, it will appear very possible, that the same individual may be an object of love in the first sense, and of hatred in the second. As a wise and good parent laments over the irregularities of a disobedient son, yet loves him tenderly, inasmuch as he ardently desires his happiness; but the more tenderly he loves him in this sense, the more will he hate and detest the odious state in which his disorder and vice has placed him. Thus it is with our heavenly Father. He loves the transgressor, inasmuch as he sincerely desires his greatest happiness; but he hates him in that horrid state where his sins have placed him.

As the second meaning of the term *hate* is equally applicable to persons or things, the hatred of God for sinners is exactly similar to his hatred of sin; and thus the author of the book of Wisdom declares, that *the ungodly, and his ungodliness, are both alike hateful unto God*; for the expression *hate* being here equally applied to the sinner and the sin, cannot be understood in the first sense, which can only relate to persons, and

never to things. Besides, could the same author, if he had meant by hatred, the desire of misery to the object, have declared, in those beautiful words already quoted, and which I repeat with so much pleasure, that *the Lord loveth all the things that are, and abhorreth nothing which he hath made, for never would he have made any thing, if he had hated it.*

It is, therefore, in the second sense that the word *hate* is to be understood, in the three passages above cited. But to make it appear yet more evident, let us examine more closely the declaration of the Psalmist, where we shall see this second sense clearly pointed out by the verse preceding that in which the hatred of God for the wicked is expressed---*For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee ; the foolish shall not stand in thy sight ; thou hatest all the workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak lies ; the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man.*

With respect to one of those passages, where the hatred of God is declared against the rebellious Israelites, I request my reader

to peruse the twenty-sixth chapter of Leviticus, whence it is taken, from the fourteenth verse to the end, as it is singularly expressive of the ways of God towards sinners, and in it will be found those two sublime and eternal truths, expressed in the most lively and striking manner: The first, that God is the implacable enemy of sin, and that he pursues and combats it to the utmost in the sinner, which is declared most forcibly from the fourteenth to the thirty-eighth verse: The second, not less evident, in the seven following verses, is, that when the severities of the Almighty have produced their effect, by conquering the obstinacy and resistance of the wicked; when sinners repent, and confess their iniquity, that *their hearts are humbled, and that they accept of the punishment of their iniquity; then the Lord remembers them, will not cast them away, neither abhors them to destroy them utterly, and to break his covenant with them, but will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors; that is, receive them into favour, and return to bless them.* The hatred, therefore, of God for the sinner, is such as corrects and brings them back to

himself, sometimes, and if need be, by the most terrible, but, at the same time, the most salutary chastisements.

It is no small thing, no doubt, to have proved that what Scripture says of the hatred of God for sinners, relates only to the displeasure which their state of rebellion excites; but I will go farther, and prove from Scripture also, that the Supreme Father of mankind wills the eternal happiness of the wicked, and thus, in the first sense applied to the term *love*, loves them infinitely.

Let us first consider those merciful declarations which relate to the salvation of all men, consequently to that of the sinner. If God wills that all men should be saved, it manifestly includes the sinner; and is not this to love them infinitely? and St Peter assures us, that *he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*. But above all, let us attend to the voice of God himself, who declares, with a solemn oath, *As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his ways and live*. How sublime and affecting, how infi-

nitely precious and valuable are those truly divine words of the Father of mercies ! In them I find every thing that is necessary for me to know respecting my Maker and myself ; I behold in them the perfect resemblance of the living God, and read the anticipated history of a sinful world. It is the Creator, the eternal Father of men, he who created their souls, who makes the declaration, and ratifies it with his oath, *As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, &c.* He desires not their death, but wills their life and happiness. And what stronger language could he have employed to assure us, that he did not hate, but that he loved the sinner ? He declares it with the solemnity of an oath, *and because he could swear by no greater, he swears by himself.*

But let us also remark the way in which he desires the life of the wicked ; it is by their conversion, they must turn to him and live. He wills their happiness ; but as that is impossible while they remain sinners, he will have them cease to be such, and become penitent and obedient children. Evident proof this, that the love of God to the

finer is equal to his hatred of sin, and that his detestation of sin arises from his love to the finner; or, in other words, that he is holy, because he is good.

But strong as these promises are, the Being who is love, foreseeing how incapable finite goodness would be of comprehending that which is infinite and passes knowledge, has given to our experience the most sensible manifestation of his love, the most transcendent display of his mercy, in the gift of his only and well-beloved Son. Certainly if mankind had continued just and holy, this work of redemption had not been necessary; it is therefore in favour of finners, and of finners alone, that this effort of love, this miracle of mercy was wrought, as our Saviour expressly declares---*They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. I came to seek and to save that which was lost.* And St Paul confirms this in a very remarkable manner, as if combating the error I am seeking to destroy, viz. That the hatred of God to finners consists in his willing their infinite misery---*It is a faithful saying, and worthy of*

all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

How great then must be the love of God to poor, wretched, offending creatures! How sincerely must he desire to save them from the dreadful misery of sin, and to raise them to perfection and happiness, since to accomplish it, he sent his own Son, and exposed him to a cruel and infamous death! How can it be possible, that after such signal experience of his infinite compassion for sinners, any should be found amongst those who are called by the name of Christ, and who glory in his death as the badge of their religious profession, that among such, nevertheless, should be found those who maintain the infinite and implacable hatred of God to the sinner, and in consequence of it, their final and irrevocable misery? How difficult is it, O my God, for thine adorable goodness to penetrate into hearts covered with thick darkness of prejudice and error!

But if the gift of the Son of God is an everlasting monument of his love for sinners, it is not less a mark of his infinite and eternal hatred of sin. How clearly is this exemplified in the work of redemption!

How odious, how insupportable in his sight must that sin appear, which he cannot behold in us, but which, as long as we continue in it, must drive us from his presence, and exclude us from all communion with him; when to deliver us from it, to cleanse and purify us, he has employed a method so extraordinary, and made so astonishing a sacrifice!

Let us then conclude from Scripture, as we have already done from reason, That the Supreme Being has an infinite hatred to sin, founded on his infinite love of the sinner; or, That he is infinitely good, and that his holiness, far from being in contradiction to his goodness, is a capital and essential branch of it.

I come next to consider the *infinite justice of God, which, far from opposing, is also a branch, an awful, but nevertheless an important branch of infinite goodness.*

The general definition of divine justice, that it is *goodness directed by wisdom*, however true upon the whole, seems to have, in quality of a definition, the defect of being too general, and not determining with pre-

cision in what the particular character of divine justice consists, or the reasons why the goodness of God is sometimes called justice. Every act of divine justice is an act of his goodness directed by wisdom, yet every act of goodness thus directed cannot be called an act of justice: As for example, the gift that God made of his Son to a sinful world, cannot with propriety be called an act of justice, though it is the highest instance of goodness and wisdom.

I therefore declare in favour of another received definition of divine justice, because it expresses, with greater precision, the ideas usually attached to the term---*That the infinite justice of God consists in his constant and immutable will to dispense to every one that which best corresponds with his moral state.* The justice of one man towards another, is *the constant and habitual will of rendering to every one that which is his due*; but as this term is wholly improper when speaking of an independent being, we substitute another; and as a man is called just who gives to every one his due, so is the Divine Being called just, because he dispenses invariably to every one that which best agrees with

his moral state ; and it is easy to comprehend, that such justice is founded on the infinite wisdom and goodness of our Maker.

According to this definition, infinite justice adapts, with the most perfect and minute detail, the respective suitableness of his dealing to our moral state, and consequently to our wants, throughout the whole of our existence.

But in order to our forming any idea of this diversity, the constant and exact exertion of which forms the essence of divine justice, we must consider here, the moral state of men and the different state of their wills ; which require a diversity of dispensations on the part of God.

If mankind constantly adhered to the laws of virtue and holiness, and thus continued in a state of moral rectitude, this diversity of dispensations would not take place, and there would be no room for the exercise of what is properly called justice. All the dealings of God with respect to man, would then be the dispensations of pure and infinite goodness, without the interference of a single chastisement, and such will be the happy economy under which the just made

perfect shall live for ever, in the mansions of celestial glory, *when all tears shall be wiped away from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.* Then will Almighty goodness never more appear arrayed in the terrors of justice; but the smiles of benignity, the manifestations of favour and blessing, will be continually displayed, and nothing ever reach our souls, but the most grateful and delightful sensations; for every dispensation will be the messenger of happiness.

But how remote are we, in our present state, from this moral perfection! No sooner do our understandings admit the first rays of that light, which is given us to direct our wills to the supreme good, but we feel irregular passions to combat, and fleshly lusts which war against the soul. Divine justice, therefore, or, if you will, divine goodness directed by wisdom, has seen proper to place us here in a mortal state, where, while we enjoy a multitude of blessings, we are at the same time exposed to a diversity of afflictions, which, in one way or other, accompany us all to the grave. Here we be-

gin to perceive the exercise of that eternal justice, which observes so minutely the suitability of its dispensations, and adapts them so exactly to the necessities of his creatures. He does not deal with sinful and imperfect man, as with man delivered from sin and arrived at perfection. This kind and good Parent will, ^{no} do doubt, that his creatures should enjoy as much happiness even here, as their state will admit; as much as is compatible with the supreme felicity to which he calls them, and therefore places them in a world furnished with an ample store of blessings, and gives them all things richly to enjoy. But lest these very blessings should, by means of their irregular passions, corrupt and enslave them, he has decreed that they should neither be solid nor lasting, but that the fashion of the world should pass away; and has placed them in it as strangers and pilgrims for a little while, that they may use the world as not abusing it, and aspire to more solid and durable good. Thus does divine justice exercise itself here below, towards a race of sinful and imperfect beings. It places us

all in a state of trial, as in a school, where we are to acquire the first rudiments of happiness; this situation is universally suitable to all men, without distinction whether of good or bad, and in this sense it is, *that the righteous scarcely are saved, and that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God.*

But while mankind succeed each other in this sublunary school of happiness, some listening to the voice of conscience and reason, contract the habits, and follow the divine laws of virtue and holiness; while others, led away by objects of sense and passion, contract habits of vice and disorder, in opposition to the divine laws; and thence some are good and others are evil; while in the dealings of divine justice towards each, is manifested the perfect rectitude of the Supreme Governor of the universe, who is righteous in all his ways. To his holy and perfect laws, he has attached the just and immutable sanction of rewards and punishments---of glorious and magnificent rewards to the faithful and obedient observers of them; and of severe and terrible chastisements to the obstinate violators of his com-

mands. It is true, that these rewards and punishments do not take place in this world, because it would interfere with the general good, and with that state of probation which requires, from divine justice, many exceptions adapted to it. In a world where the righteous and wicked are interspersed, and where good and evil are blended, an exact retribution of either would be impracticable. But those exceptions, or rather those delays, do not make void the sanction of those laws which are immutable; for God has himself announced, in the life to come, a great day of retribution, which may well be termed the day of divine justice. In that day the righteous, that is, those who have wrought out their salvation, having no farther need of trial, shall be separated from the wicked; while Almighty justice executes, on the one and on the other, that immutable sanction of rewards and punishments due to their respective conduct.

The precise and determinate idea of infinite justice then is, That invariable will, by which a total difference will be made between the righteous and the wicked; the

former most gloriously rewarded, and the latter severely punished.

If the extreme importance of the subject I am upon, did not require from me all the precision of which I am capable, I might forbear enlarging upon the present idea of divine justice by quoting from Scripture, because in itself sufficiently simple and natural, and as all who are conversant with holy writ know that it is there repeatedly expressed---Patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, concur in the same sentiment. Abraham, when pleading with the Almighty in favour of the inhabitants of Sodom, in the eighteenth chapter of Genesis, makes this idea of divine justice the foundation of his argument. And in the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel, the Supreme Being condescends, in the most explicit and instructive manner, to explain the method of his dealings with his creatures, where we shall find this maxim exemplified, that *the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.*

But why do I cite particular passages in proof of the justice of God, when the whole history of the Old Testament contains no-

thing else? Such is the relation of the deluge, where a race of wicked men were exterminated from the earth, *but Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.* The destruction of Sodom, from which Lot was preserved. And, lastly, the whole history of the Israelites---the alternatives of benedictions and threatenings, of prosperity and adversity, which followed them, according as they were obedient or rebellious to their Divine Lawgiver. The New Testament also abounds with promises and menaces---magnificent promises to the righteous, and dreadful threatenings to the impenitent. I might appeal to the whole gospel dispensation, which opens to our view that future economy that awaits us all, and unveils that awful, but infinitely interesting scene of universal judgment, which shall succeed the resurrection. St Paul tells the Athenians, that *in that day God will judge the world in righteousness*; that is, as he expresses it elsewhere, *will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life: But to those who obey.*

unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish.

Having hitherto explained and confirmed from Scripture, the definition of divine justice, to be the constant and immutable will of the Supreme Being, to dispense to every one that which is best adapted to his moral state; the result of all I have said is, that this infinite justice of God consists in his invariably recompensing the good, and severely punishing the wicked.

It now remains to shew, that such justice, far from opposing the goodness of the Almighty, is in itself a branch of that goodness, since it is goodness that abundantly rewards the righteous, and severely punishes the wicked.

With respect to rewards, the truth is sufficiently evident not to need a discussion. The Supreme Judge, beholding the virtuous in that state of habitual holiness which is requisite to fit them for happiness, dispenses to them that felicity which is suitable to their state, according to the extent of their capacities, and of his infinite love towards them. With relation to them, therefore, his justice is pure uninterrupted goodness.

But is it goodness also that will inflict on the disobedient the dreadful punishments of a future existence? Is that severity of an offended God, to which Scripture gives the terrible appellations of indignation, wrath, and fury, to be ranked in the class of goodness? Yes, I scruple not to affirm, because I can demonstrate it with the clearest evidence. The Supreme Being never arrays himself in the terrors of his majesty, never punishes his offending creatures, but infinite goodness leads him to it----that goodness which I have already defined to be his constant will to confer happiness, nothing but real good, whatever form it may wear, and even all possible good. It is this which, assuming the name of justice, will execute on the wicked those terrible denunciations which the gospel contains, as I have undertaken to prove, and shall shortly fully explain.

But alas! how far is this from the generally received idea of punitive justice among Christians, who, instead of considering it as a branch of goodness, place it in direct opposition, and even represent this attribute as most hostile to divine benignity, since no-

thing appears, at first sight, more contrary to goodness, than that extreme severity which God will inflict on the wicked. This justice is therefore described as stopping for ever the course of divine goodness, which exists no more for the sinner, on whom Almighty justice has nothing to confer through eternal ages, but the most horrible and affrighting torments. Where is the mind sufficiently courageous to realize this shocking idea? to me even the task of refuting it is painful.

The advocates for this system are sufficiently ready to admit, that in this life the severities of God proceed from his goodness, and that he *chastizes us for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness*. But no sooner does the question relate to a future life, than the whole is changed; and, according to their representation, the nature of God and of man must have undergone a total revolution. Repentance will be no more; either it will be impossible for the wicked ever to repent; or, if they do, it will avail them nothing with an implacable Judge, who has no mercy for them, but has forgotten to be gracious. He will no long-

er, as in this life, punish them for their correction, but, for the sole end of rendering them miserable. His goodness, till then universal, will become limited, and will have no other object for its exertion but the righteous; and while they experience the abundance of his love, the treasures of wrath, the severities of avenging inexorable justice, will be showered down in unutterable anguish, and in never-ending duration, on the head of the unhappy sinner.

But whence this strange, this alarming subversion in the nature of things? I might add, whence this total change in the immutable nature of God himself? Ye souls, where candour and uprightness dwell, for to such I address myself particularly, will you believe that all this proceeds from a single word ill understood; a word which is universally acknowledged to admit of two meanings in Scripture; and which, in the present application, may be understood in two ways, one entirely rational, the other as entirely irrational and absurd?*

* That the expressions *for ever*, *everlasting*, and *eternal*, as they occur in the English Bible, are frequently applied to finite duration, is obvious to every

midable word, which has made such havock in the minds of men, is the appellation of *eternal*, given to the sufferings of a future state.

reader: Thus the servant is said to serve his master for ever, Exod. xxi. 6. the blowing of trumpets, under the Mosaic dispensation, is said to be an ordinance for ever, Num. x. 8. the priesthood of Aaron is called an everlasting priesthood, Num. xxv. 13. and the earth is said to be established for ever, Psal. lxxviii. 69. The Apostle Paul likewise recommends to Philemon to receive Onesimus for ever. The kingdom of Christ is called an everlasting kingdom, 2 Pet. i. 11.; but the Apostle Paul informs us, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, that he will deliver up the kingdom to the Father, when the ends for which it was given him are accomplished. The glad tidings of salvation, are likewise designed the everlasting gospel, Rev. xiv. 6. although the gospel dispensation is universally allowed not to extend beyond the general judgment.

The indefinite manner in which these words are used in the English Bible, arise from a mis-translation. The Hebrew word עולם rendered *for ever*, has, for its leading idea, to hide or conceal; and, when applied to time, denotes any unknown period. In like manner, the Greek words αἰών and αἰωνιος, which our translators have rendered *for ever*, *everlasting*, *eternal*, &c. literally signifies *an age*. But what must be sufficient to convince us that endless duration is not the idea intended to be conveyed by these Greek words

Now, though it is evident that God in his written word, as well as in his works, appeals to our reason, and that the sense in

is, that they frequently occur in a plural form, which we must then translate *eternities*.

An objection may probably be here started, That if the above mentioned expressions do not imply absolute eternity, what assurance have we that the happiness of the righteous will not come to an end?

To this objection two satisfactory answers occur. 1st, Every argument that proves the restoration of the wicked, proves also the endless felicity of the righteous: For if it is true, as has been already noticed, that God could have no other view in the creation of rational beings than to render them happy, it is impossible to conceive, that those who through faith and patience are rendered fit inhabitants of the New Jerusalem, should be ever divested of that happiness, unless we suppose the Most High actuated by caprice instead of goodness.—Is it for the purpose of destroying sin, which is in opposition to the divine nature, and restoring that holiness without which rational creatures cannot arrive at supreme felicity, that our just and merciful Judge subjects the wicked to the sufferings of the second death; we must then conclude, that those in whom sin is mortified, and the image of God restored, by the sanctifying influences of the word and spirit of God in this life, shall go no more out from the heavenly inheritance; for our gracious Father afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men.

which this term is generally understood, is as revolting to reason, as it is repugnant to the nature of God and of things, mankind

2dly, Though it must be allowed that those expressions, which are indifferently applied to the sufferings of the wicked and the happiness of the righteous, do not prove the eternity of the one more than the other; yet there are other passages which establish, in the clearest manner, that the joys of the people of God shall never end. The following instances may suffice:—1. By comparing Rev. xxii. 5. with 1 Cor. xv. 24. we find, in the first of these passages, that the righteous are to reign *εις τας αιωνας των αιωνων*, *to the ages of the ages*, and the duration of the punishment of the ungodly is expressed in the same manner; but in 1 Cor. xv. 24. we are informed that this reign of the saints shall come to an end, “when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall put down all rule, and authority, and power.” From these passages it appears, that during those ages in which the wicked suffer, the saints shall be partakers with Christ in that government which he shall then exercise for the subjection of his enemies—that when the end of this government is attained, by subduing all opposition, it will be put an end to—that, instead of the happiness of the righteous ceasing at this period, it shall become more complete, for “when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in

obstinately persist to understand it, in the absolute sense, of an infinite and never-ending duration; and, by a necessary conse-

“all.” This passage certainly points out the highest and the most universal felicity.—The nearest approach to Deity will be then attained, and all creation in the glorious state described by St John, Rev. v. 13. “And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the lamb, for ever and ever.”

2. The promise of Jesus Christ to his disciples, John xiv. 19. “Because I live ye shall live also,” proves the life and felicity of the righteous to be co-eval with his.

3. Isaiah xlv. 17. “Israel shall be saved with an everlasting salvation; ye shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end”—and the promise to the overcomers, Rev. iii. 12. that they “shall go no more out,” point out the duration of the happiness of the righteous in terms very different from those which are used to express the duration of future punishment.

4. Although the Scripture informs us that the Mediatory kingdom and government shall cease, and be delivered up to the Father, yet we learn, from Isaiah ix. 7. that “of the increase of his government

quence, are compelled to attribute to the Divine Being, under the name of justice, a disposition absolutely destructive of infinite goodness. They do not indeed venture to assert, that any thing like cruelty can reside in his perfect and adorable nature ; on the contrary, they continue to affirm, however contradictory to their hypothesis, that the Supreme Being is infinitely good, but nevertheless maintain that he will inflict, on a very considerable number of his creatures, most aggravated torments throughout all eternity.

I lament the strange and deplorable necessity which compels me to refute this

“ and peace there shall be no end ;” or, as it might be more literally translated, “ of the fruit of that government, even of peace, there shall be no end.”

These passages, among a number of others to the same purpose, shew the objection to be unfounded ; and that, independent of the words rendered *eternal* and *everlasting* in our translation, the endless happiness of the righteous is distinctly pointed out in Scripture.—The reader may consult, for a more full answer to the objections commonly brought against universal restoration, *An Humble Attempt to investigate the Scripture doctrine concerning the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, by the late James Purves of Edinburgh.—*Edit.*

shocking idea of divine justice ; and that after having so clearly demonstrated that the Deity is infinitely good, I must now prove that he cannot be infinitely cruel.

I shall not here examine why the word *eternal* is used to express future sufferings, because it is possible I may treat of that hereafter ; but I shall lay down as a principle which no one contests, that the word *eternal* is made use of in Scripture sometimes to signify an infinite, sometimes a finite duration. This will enable me to rectify a capital mistake incident to those who argue on this subject, which is determining their ideas of the justice of God by the duration of sufferings, which they suppose infinite. Though this error is important, it is nevertheless natural to men, who find this doctrine established in the church in which they are born, and who receive it by instruction at an age when their minds are incapable of discerning the absolute impossibility of its truth. Accustomed to consider this doctrine as a truth founded on revelation, and therefore incontestable, they argue, from the eternal sufferings of a life to come, that

divine justice requires such punishment ; and thus the very nature of that attribute becomes perverted. Now, this is evidently a capital mistake ; for since the word *eternal* is susceptible of two meanings, as no one will deny, how can we judge of the justice of God by an equivocal term ? Ought we not, on the contrary, to determine the sense of an ambiguous word by the fixed and invariable idea we have of his justice ; and not take it for granted, that this word applied to future sufferings implies an infinite duration ; and therefore that in the divine nature, however excellent, is included an attribute entirely contrary to goodness ? which is as manifest a contradiction as to advance that the Supreme Being is at once infinitely good and infinitely cruel. Rather let us argue, that the Deity, being infinitely just, will inflict on the wicked just and equitable punishments ; punishments exactly proportioned, both in degree and duration, to the nature and extent of their crimes ; which is to say, in other words, that he will treat them in a manner suitable to their moral state ; which is agreeable to the natural and eternal ideas of divine justice.

If, then, it is by the justice of God we are to determine the duration of sufferings to be finite or infinite, let us endeavour to know why, and for what end, divine justice will punish the wicked in a future state. If we consult that idea of divine justice, which ought always to serve us as a guide, the answer will be easy : For, the justice of God being, with respect to the wicked, his constant will to dispense to them what best suits their moral state, it is evident he will punish them in a future existence, because such punishment is best adapted to their moral depravity. The question is next reduced to this, Why the future sufferings that God will inflict on the wicked are suitable to their moral state ? The answer to this is so simple, that it would naturally present itself to an unprejudiced mind ; for the moral condition of a sinner is so contrary to nature, so hurtful and odious, so miserable and detestable, that the Divine Being, who, from the purity and perfection of his nature, sees such a state in all its deformity, cannot, nor will not suffer him to remain in it, but will inflict sufferings on the wicked hereafter, as a necessary

mean whereby to disengage them from sin, and render them virtuous---in a word to correct and convert them ; *and thus the sufferings of another world are real chastisements.* Such is the sublime and magnificent proposition I am about to demonstrate from reason and Scripture ; and from thence will result, with equal evidence, what I have established already, that *the infinite justice of God, far from being an implacable severity towards the wicked, in contradiction with his infinite goodness, is, in itself, a branch awful and respectable indeed, but nevertheless a precious and interesting branch of infinite goodness.*

The proposition I am going to establish maintains, that *God will punish the wicked in a future state for their conversion ; so that their sufferings will be real chastisements.*

And here the deep-rooted and universal prejudices I encounter, oblige me to enter into a much more minute detail, and collect a greater variety of proofs, in order to carry conviction into the mind, than would otherwise be necessary ; that by some one of these, I may convince understandings which, though prepossessed, yet retain upright and honest hearts.

The first proof I shall bring in favour of this truth, and which, if admitted, were singly sufficient ; is the infinite love of God for the sinner, by which he wills their conversion and their life, and by which it is impossible that he should ever inflict any suffering on them, but with a view to their conversion and happiness. In treating of the holiness of the Divine nature, I have proved the infinite love of God for the sinner, and that from this love arises his implacable hatred to sin, as an unsurmountable obstacle in the way of their happiness.

Thus the sufferings he inflicts on them, whether in this, or in a future world, are designed as remedies and cures for that dreadful infection of the soul. It is an eternal truth, founded on the very nature of God, which is love, that he chastises all the sons of men, the comparatively just and unjust, *for their profit, that they may be partakers of his holiness.*

Let us not say, in order to evade the force of this argument, that the love which God has for the wicked in this life, will, in the next, be converted into hatred ; as indeed it must be, if it could lead him to in-

flit eternal torments upon them. And is there then a time when Divine love can be changed into hatred, when God himself can alter? and this period, shall it be the universal judgment? Just Heavens! As well might we presume to affirm, there is a period when he shall cease to be; for the one is as possible as the other. No, the love of God will never change, because it cannot; for his love, like all his attributes, is infinite, immutable, and eternal. If there ever was a moment, a single instant, when he loved the sinner; if he loved him when he created him, when he protested with an oath that he desired his conversion and his life; if he loved him when, for his sake, he spared not his own Son, he will love him with the same love throughout infinite ages; and as soon might he cease to exist, as cease to love.

With frail and mortal man, this transition from love to hatred is not only very possible, but, alas! very frequent; the object that appears amiable one day, may on the morrow excite aversion and disgust, and but too often hatred.---But how can any thing like this take place in the omniscient Creator of men, *to whom all his works*

are known from the beginning? Were the wicked culpable at the instant when they were created? If then their Maker produced them by an effect of his love, that love was infinite; and it is impossible that futurity should ever discover any thing relative to them, which he did not perfectly know at the moment of their creation: It is then impossible that any thing should change his love into hatred. When his almighty fiat called them into existence, his glance pervaded every scene through which they were to pass: He knew the long resistance they would oppose to his offers of mercy and grace: He knew the obduracy into which long habits of sin would bring them: But God, who is greater than our hearts, knew also by what treasures of wrath, by what severities of justice, he should at length overcome this obdurate resistance; by what powerful, but nevertheless salutary means, *he should take away the stony heart, and give us a heart of flesh*; in a word, *he knew how to work in us, to will and to do of his good pleasure*; and therefore his love determined to confer existence on creatures, whose moral state could in the course of time

be made as perfect and amiable as was their natural state at the moment of their creation. Let us then conclude, that the dispositions of Almighty goodness can never change with respect to us ; but that however severe the punishments of a future world may be, they are designed for our conversion, and are real corrections.

I draw my second proof of this truth, from those general rules which Scripture constantly attributes to God in the dispensation of sufferings ; these are three in number. The first informs us when, and on what occasions, he will punish the wicked ; the second, how much, or to what degree ; the third, when this punishment will cease, and his favour be restored to them ; the result of which will shew, that the Supreme Being never chastises but with a view to correct, and that the future punishments of the wicked are designed to bring about their conversion and happiness.

The *first* rule which divine justice observes, in the dispensation of sufferings, is *never to proceed to extreme rigour, till every gentle mean has been exhausted without effect ;* so that torments and sufferings will only be

employed, as far as they are absolutely requisite, for the conversion of the sinner.

If all mankind could be delivered from the bondage of sin, and brought to God by methods of gentleness and beneficence, he would never make use of any other; for he declares in his word, that *he doth not afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men---Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die, saith the Lord God, and not that he should return from his ways?---He would draw them with cords of a man, with bands of love; and when the necessity of their situation requires severity, it is called doing his strange work, and bringing to pass his act, his strange act.* Thence he proclaims himself to be *the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.* Thence the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, by which he invites men to repentance: But above all, thence the greatest and most inconceivable instance of his infinite love to sinners, in the gift of *his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* So true it is, that divine justice never proceeds to extreme rigour,

till every gentle mean has been exhausted without effect, and till severity is thereby become necessary, as the only mean of conversion.

Besides the reasons that we see in the nature of perfect goodness for this first rule in the dispensation of punishment, we can discern another relative to ourselves. The general design of God is to excite in the hearts of his creatures a sincere and ardent love. *My son, give me thine heart*, is the language of all his dealings. He is a kind and a gracious Father, who will be loved with all our soul, and with all our strength; we must have no will but his, and constantly, sincerely, and universally, sacrifice our own with cheerfulness, to his most perfect and excellent will. This is the holiness, the sanctification to which we are all called. But if such is our vocation, the Divine Being will, on his part, shew himself to us as infinitely amiable and worthy to be beloved; and it is not by severity and stripes that this is to be effected, but by gentleness, by tokens of love and affection; *he therefore leaves not himself without a witness, in that he does us good*. He discovers himself

to us as a tender parent, constantly concerned for the good of his children, and labouring to advance their happiness. Those who, by a wise improvement of the means granted them, shew themselves obedient to the instructions of his word and providence, are drawn by the bands of love. Such have no need of the severities of an offended God. He may indeed see fit, for the exercise of their faith and patience, to send them trials and afflictions in this world, *for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?* but such afflictions tend to detach them from the world, and to make them more fit for heaven; they are the scourgings of a son who is owned and received.

But those, on the contrary, who make the blessings of divine goodness subservient only to their worldly lusts; who love darkness better than light; who neglect the means of instruction and salvation, which are multiplied in the midst of them, and live in a total forgetfulness of God and of his will to gratify their own; in a word, those *who despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the good-*

*ness of God leads to repentance ; for those the extreme rigour of punishment will be absolutely necessary in order to their salvation. For how shall those arrive at the knowledge of the truth who hate it, and prefer darkness ; or acquire that docility of heart, without which they cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven ? For such severity alone is suitable ; not indeed with an immediate design to create in them the love of their Maker, but to destroy those obstacles which his love could not conquer, and to give efficacy to those means of instruction which were before ineffectual. The wrath of God must humble and subdue such proud hearts, and bitter pangs of distress must make them feel what they were told in vain, that *God is not mocked* ; and that though an infinitely kind and merciful father, he is also infinitely powerful, will be heard when he speaks, and obeyed when he commands. Thus we are told, that the wicked, *by the hardness and impenitence of their hearts, treasure up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God ; and that if we sin wilfully, after having received the knowledge of the truth, (by**

Jesus Christ) *there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversary.* Let us now examine how, and to what degree, divine justice will employ this method of conversion.

If the first rule which divine justice follows, in the dispensation of punishment, is never to proceed to rigour, till every other method has been tried in vain; the *second* is, *to employ that rigour only so much, and so long, as shall be necessary to the destruction of sin, and the conversion of the sinner.*

This second rule carries its own evidence with it, and is a necessary consequence of the first, already established: For when every other method has failed of success, severity must be employed, and will be made use of by God to subdue sin, and bring about the sanctification and salvation of the sinner, to what degrees or duration soever it may be necessary to extend this discipline, in order to obtain the end. This then is a war, an implacable and eternal war against sin; a terrible war, which can only be terminated by the destruction of that hideous

monster in the soul of the wicked. The Being whose designs are immutable will not change his purpose ; this change must take place in the sinner, who must be transformed, however painful the operation---must become a new man, a new creature ; and for this end the divine judgments must make war upon him.

But it is not enough to appeal to reason in vindication of this truth ; I will confirm it yet farther from Scripture. Isaiah expresses it, when he declares, *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.* But some will object, that if, according to this divine declaration, there is no peace to the wicked, they must be lost without possibility of return. Ah ! take heed, lest by precipitating your judgment you falsify this sacred declaration, and apply to it a meaning which it has not, nor ever can have. To understand it aright, it must be confronted with that passage, where the God of truth confirms with an oath, that he wills the conversion and life of a sinner. Opposite as these declarations may seem, it is nevertheless the Supreme Being who speaks in both, and who speaks of the sinner ; and as no contra-

diction can reside in him, there must be a sense in which they perfectly agree. Why then, let me ask, is there no peace to the wicked? Is it founded on the hatred of their Maker, who wills their eternal and irrevocable misery? No; he declares that he wills their conversion and life. The reason is manifestly this, that so long as the wicked remain in an impenitent state, they cannot obtain that life and happiness for the enjoyment of which they were created. They must therefore turn from their wickedness in order to live, and till this revolution is accomplished, they will most assuredly experience the effects of this formidable and implacable war, which the Almighty has proclaimed against them, in the words already quoted.

If any thing more express should be needful upon this head, let us attend to the words of Jeremiah---*Behold the whirlwind of the Lord goeth forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind, it shall fall with pain on the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the Lord shall not return until he hath done it, and until he hath performed the intent of his heart; in*

the latter days ye shall consider it. These latter days are made use of by the prophets, to denote that more resplendent light, that farther manifestation of divine mercy, that intent of his heart relative to the universal salvation of men, which was *according to the eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Conformable to which the prophet declares, *that the fierce anger of the Lord shall not return UNTIL HE HATH PERFORMED THE INTENT OF HIS HEART;* those purposes of eternal and universal salvation, the fuller manifestation of which was reserved for the latter days.

In Ezekiel also we find the same idea conveyed, under the image of a vessel of brass, totally corrupted by inveterate rust; and the sufferings of the wicked represented by the figure of a consuming fire.---*Set it empty upon the coals, that the brass of it may be hot, and may burn, and that the filthiness of it may be molten in it, that the scum of it may be consumed.* *She hath wearied me with her lies, and her great scum went not forth out of her; her scum shall be in the fire. In thy filthiness is lewdness; because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou*

shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee. I the Lord have spoken it; it shall come to pass, and I will do it; I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent. How formidable a menace is here! a declaration from the Most High, that when the gentle methods of his grace have been insufficient to cleanse the wicked from their filthiness, he will employ the dreadful rigours of his indignation, which are compared to a consuming fire: Nor will he go back, neither will he spare, till the wicked are purged from their filthiness.

Lastly, on this subject I recommend to my reader the perusal of the twenty-sixth chapter of Leviticus, from the fourteenth verse to the end, where he will perceive the second rule of divine justice clearly laid down, and expressed in the most striking manner; and the chastisement of God increased and prolonged, in proportion to the obduracy and resistance of the wicked, till at length their obstinacy is overcome.

Let us not quit the subject, without making one important reflection, to which it naturally leads, concerning the judgment

we ought to form of the terrible nature of the sufferings of a future state, from the difficulty of the effect they are intended to produce. How formidable must be those sufferings which can soften the obdurate heart, break asunder the many chains by which the soul of the sinner is held in bondage, root up the most inveterate habits, destroy the subtle poison of unruly and sinful passions, whose infection has spread, and corrupted all the powers of the soul, all the faculties of the mind, all the sentiments of the heart; in a word, such sufferings as shall entirely change the sinner, give him in all respects different ideas, different views, tastes, and inclinations.

St Peter remarks, that *if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* as if he had said, if so many trials and afflictions are necessary for the salvation of the just, of those who have acquired the habits of virtue, and are sincerely attached to their duty; how great and terrible, both in degree and duration, will the sufferings be which are reserved for those whom long habits of sin have corrupted and hardened? With what just abhor-

rence should it fill us for sin, that fatal enemy of our peace, that tyrant of the soul, from which it will require such dreadful sufferings to free us ! The gospel, that dispensation of mercy, which was given that we might flee from the wrath to come ; that ineffable gift of the only-begotten Son of God, whereby whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but obtain everlasting life, however compassionate to the penitent offender, speaks nothing but terror and alarm to the guilty and hardened sinner.---How striking, how awful, and at the same time how merciful, are the representations of future torments ! Let us collect the leading features of the striking picture, and we shall see that it is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It is represented under the figure of perishing, of being cast into outer darkness, of a worm that never dies, of a fire that is never quenched, of a lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, into which the wicked shall be cast ; and where they shall perish eternally. And though neither the word perish is here to be understood as a total extinction of being ; nor can that of *eternal* imply endless dura-

tion; nevertheless they are undoubtedly employed to signify bitter anguish, deep and durable distress; which can only be terminated by a total change in the disposition of the sufferer. And this leads us to the *third* rule of divine justice, in the dispensation of sufferings, and informs us when the Supreme Being ceases punishment.

As it is against sin, that the wrath of the Lord is declared, *he will constantly pardon, and receive into favour the sincerely penitent offender.* Repentance appeases divine anger, and disarms its justice; because it accomplishes the end infinite goodness has in view, even when arrayed in the awful majesty of avenging justice; which was severe because the moral state of the sinner required such discipline; and which, when that state is reversed by conversion and holiness, will have nothing to bestow suitable to it, but the delightful manifestations of mercy and forgiveness.

But here some will ask, Whether such repentance is sufficient thus to disarm almighty justice, after having, by a long and obstinate disobedience, audaciously violated the holy laws of God? Is repentance a suffi-

cient satisfaction, a suitable reparation for the offence committed against infinite majesty ; a proper vindication of the divine commands ? and can repentance, however sincere, annihilate what is past ? shall the sinner be thus acquitted and treated as if he had not offended ?

There are many things I could advance in answer to this objection. I could prove that every the least degree of resentment and vengeance is a carnal emotion of the mind ; that it belongs only to human nature, and to that in its degraded and animal state ; that nothing resembling these sentiments can be found in the Deity ; that he does not, properly speaking, inflict sufferings, because the sinner has offended, but to the end that he may sin no more ; thus the divine chastisements relate to the past, only as they are connected with the future ; that with respect to the Divine Majesty, our evil, any more than our good, cannot extend to him ; no self-interest, therefore, can incline him to inflict punishment ; no dignity, perfectly independent on human actions, can induce him to severity ; that the honour of the divine law is sufficiently guarded by

the punishment of the sinner, as long as he remains impenitent, and by the faithful and obedient adherence of the penitent offender; that divine justice is always satisfied when it attains its end; and that this end is always attained, whenever the sinner is brought to repentance.

But instead of insisting on these arguments, however just, I will call the attention to those clear and remarkable declarations of God himself in his word. And *first*, in the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel, where he says, *If the wicked turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, and shall not die.* And shall not his former sins be brought into account against him? No; for the Lord goes on to declare, that *all his transgressions that he hath committed, shall not be mentioned unto him; in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.* But why will not divine justice punish former offences? The Being against whom they were committed condescends to instruct us in the reason: *Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God, and not that he should re-*

turn from his ways and live? And is not this, in express terms, to assert, that to punish the sinner after his conversion, for his former sins, would be to take pleasure in the death of the wicked? or in other words, it would be hatred, revenge, and cruelty; odious and horrible sentiments, which can never be found in a being who desires the happiness of his creatures, and whose severities have this end in view. Therefore the happiness of the sinner is inseparable from his conversion.

A *second* answer to the objection, not less positive than that already quoted, may be found in the first chapter of Isaiah, where the Supreme Being, after reproaching the children of Israel for their extreme corruption and hypocrisy, says, *Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well.* After which he adds, *Come now, and let us reason together.* According to the apprehensions of those whose opinions I am combating, the judge might allege *that they who commit such things are worthy of death.* And what can the criminal bring in his defence? Nothing, certainly, to efface his past

transgressions; though, through divine grace and divine chastisements, he may, conformable to the command of his Maker, *have washed and made him clean, and put away the evil of his doings; have ceased to do evil, and learned to do well.*---*We know that the Judge of all the earth will do right.* Attend therefore to the sentence---*though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; tho' they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*

Another, and not less remarkable declaration is also to be found in Isaiah: *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.* And lest this readiness to forgive should appear incomprehensible to men who are evil, divine goodness condescends to account for his conduct;---*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord: For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

And after all these declarations by the mouth of the prophets, on the part of God,

he hath, in these last days, spoken to us by his Son, who, in his gospel, is the messenger of such terrible threatenings to the wicked, and is charged with the execution of them at the last day. He represents the Deity as a father who had two sons, under whom are included the righteous and the wicked: The younger requires of his father the portion of goods allotted to him, and takes his journey into a far country, where, wasting his substance with riotous living, he is reduced by famine to the most extreme want: In this calamity, which is meant to signify the chastisements of the wicked, and which from its severity, becomes salutary, the young man comes to himself, and resolves to go to his father---here we behold the returning penitent. Let us observe how the Parent of mankind receives such. *While his son was yet afar off, his father saw him, and had compassion on him, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him; and instead of answering the confession of his unworthiness with severity or reproach, he commands his servants to bring forth the best robe and put it on him; to put a ring on his finger, and shoes on his*

feet, and to make ready the festival which was to celebrate his return. Such is the conduct of the father with his disobedient, but penitent son ; whereby our Divine Master confirms, in a very striking example, the declaration of Isaiah, that *when the wicked forsakes his way, and returneth unto the Lord, he will have mercy upon him, and abundantly pardon him*. But his dealings with the elder son are yet more remarkable, yet more affecting. He returns from the field, and being informed of the reason of the rejoicing he heard within, is angry, and will not go in ; upon which his father comes out and entreats him ; but he, giving way to confused and carnal ideas of justice, makes to him the same objection which may arise in the minds of many of my readers : *Lo these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandments ; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends ; but as soon as this thy son is come, who has devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf*. This complaint being founded on facts, appears both just and reasonable. Let us therefore attentively consider the an-

swer, and remember that it is God who speaks in it : *Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.* Is not the enjoyment of every true good, in the presence of his father, sufficient for the elder? Or does the essence of happiness consist in the exclusion of others? Now, with respect to the younger, his father declares, that *it was meet they should make merry and be glad, for a brother who was dead and is alive again; was lost and is found.* How sublime, how truly divine is this answer? The elder son made no mention of the repentance of his brother, esteeming it as nothing, while the tender and compassionate father looked upon that repentance as every thing, and the whole of the argument is founded upon it; *thy brother was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found; therefore it was meet we should make merry and be glad.* How truly might we gather from this reply, that the ways of the Almighty are not our ways! And how strongly does it evince this important truth, that the Divine Being will constantly pardon every sinner who returns to him by a sincere repentance.

Such are the three immutable rules which divine justice observes in dispensing sufferings, which I shall not recapitulate, because they are founded in reason, and positively proved from Scripture ; but I shall observe, that if these declarations are indeed the words of God, the second proof of the sublime proposition I mean to establish must be true also, viz. *That all the punishments which will be inflicted on the wicked in a future state, are designed for their conversion ; so that they are real corrections.*

Thirdly and lastly, I shall shew, by a variety of passages from Scripture, the absolute impossibility of the eternal duration of sufferings, because those passages are incompatible with such a signification. I shall reduce them under three classes to avoid confusion.

The *first* class comprehends all such texts as compare the duration of divine severity with that of divine favour. The Psalmist says, speaking of God, *his anger endureth but for a moment, in his favour is life* ; and the reason of this evidently is, that his anger is exercised for a time, that he may display the effects of his favour throughout all eter-

nity. His anger is a transient mean ; his favour an established end. Alas ! were it otherwise, and were the sufferings of the wicked to last for ever, we should be obliged to reverse the text ; for this mortal life, the only period in which they could enjoy any portion of divine favour, is surely but a moment compared with eternal duration ! But thanks be to God, his word every where contradicts this dreadful supposition, and it is not less true now, than when he declared to his ancient people, *In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee ; neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee.*

I proceed next to another class of passages, if possible more decisive than the former, which expressly declare, that *the Lord will not always chide ; neither will he keep his anger for ever.* And do we not speak the same language with the Psalmist, when we maintain that future suffering,

which is the wrath to come, will not last eternally, because he will not keep his anger for ever? The contest which is to destroy sin, will be long and painful to sinners, but as they are not stronger than God, he must at length prevail, for he will not always chide. How comforting is it to the soul, oppressed and terrified almost to despair by the weight of her sins, and the horrid apprehension of eternal sufferings, to taste this good word of the Lord, which our Saviour has assured us shall never pass away, though heaven and earth should be removed! How delightful to find in it those comforting words of the prophet Jeremiah :---*The Lord will not cast off for ever ; but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion, according to the multitude of his mercies : For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.*

I come now to the *third* class, which comprehends all those passages describing the Supreme Being as our Creator. And these, like all the former, are proofs founded on the highest authority, that of God himself; and yet this is not all, for as his word is an address to our reason, so he condescends to

reason with us, that he may convey light and conviction to our souls, which is evident in all those texts representing the Divine Being as our Maker. Creation is our primeval title to divine love and beneficence; the gift of existence is the first and fundamental blessing, the seal and token of every other. We know from thence, that he is good and full of love to us; because, when he had no need of us he created us, and in conferring existence upon us, we and our happiness are become his care. By that act of wisdom, goodness, and power, the Creator has undertaken the charge of our happiness, and had he not certainly known he could accomplish it, he would never have given us being. But let us attend to those inspired words of the Psalmist, which speak the language of confidence and assurance---
The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever; forsake not the work of thine own hands. The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me
 ---And what is that concern so interesting to me? What, but my happiness! the utmost happiness of which my nature is capable. Now, from the first moment of my

being to the present, he has not ceased to conduct me towards, and to prepare me for that celestial happiness; and had I constantly adhered to the salutary dictates of his providence and grace, and not turned aside to do mine own will, I should doubtless have made a far greater progress in the career of happiness. But how remote soever I may yet be from this desirable attainment, yet I know that the Lord will perfect that which concerneth me, and that whatever means my moral state may require, will be made use of to elevate me to perfection and felicity. But how do I know it? because his mercy endureth for ever. This is the solid basis on which my everlasting hopes repose: This mercy is inexhaustible, can never be tired, nor fail of the time requisite for the execution of its designs; because to him a thousand years are as one day, and eternity is his. Thus, whatever the freedom of my will has resisted here, will be accomplished hereafter, where I shall be chastised, and saved from those sins that place an obstacle between me and my happiness, where divine goodness will, if necessary, employ the most rigorous and terrible means

to bring me to supreme felicity ; for he will not forsake the work of his hands. So long, therefore, as it shall be true that I am his work, so long will it be true also that he cannot abandon me ; and these admirable words of David, which I apply to myself, relate equally to all my brethren, to every son of Adam.

But must I now compare these luminous and exhilarating truths, with the gloomy and discomfoting opinion I am combating ? Alas ! were the torments of the wicked of infinite duration, these sublime truths would not be such for the reprobate ; it would not be true for them, *that the Lord would perfect that which concerneth them* ; it would not be true for them *that the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever* ; nor would it be true, *that he doth not forsake the work of his hands*. Forsake, did I say ? Ah ! shall I have the courage to follow this dreadful system through all its revolting consequences ? Happy were it for them did he forsake them---did he utterly abandon, and leave them a prey to death and the grave, where annihilation might swallow them up for ever. No ; his al-

mighty power must be displayed in their resurrection; in creating them, as it were, a second time, in giving them an immortal existence, to the end that the fierce anger, the implacable terrors of the Lord, may be discharged upon them through all eternity. And is this the Father of mercies! the Parent of the human race? No; it is the phantom of error. Gracious God! by what prodigy of blindness art thou thus misrepresented, in the midst of those very sinners for whom thou gavest thy well-beloved Son, that he might perfect that which concerneth them.

But I turn from this terrifying aspect, to finish my third class of texts, with those comforting and restoring words in Isaiah, where we shall hear our merciful Creator declare, that he doth not punish or reject for ever:---*For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones:* (that is, such as my chastisements have humbled and converted) *For I will not contend for ever, nei-*

ther will I be always wroth ; for the spirit shall fail before me, and the souls which I have made. What a declaration is here! He will not contend for ever; but till the heart of the sinner is become humble and contrite. Then will the High and Holy One receive him into his presence, and revive his spirit; and he will act thus for the eternal reason himself declares, lest the souls to whom he hath given existence should fail before him. Now, will not the same reason subsist at the great day of accounts? Will it not be equally true then as now, that he is the Maker of our souls?

The passages which come under the *fourth* head, express the universal destination of men to salvation, happiness, and life eternal, and are so many declarations absolutely incompatible with the eternal duration of sufferings. Were it otherwise, it would not be true that all men were created for happiness; but, on the contrary, that two very opposite destinations were assigned them, some to felicity, others to infinite misery. Such, however, is not the language of the divine word: *God our Saviour will*

have all men to be saved---he is the Saviour of all men: And in order to announce this grand truth as a thing that will infallibly take place, and which will be equally certain and universal as our condemnation to mortality on earth, we are told, that *as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation (to death); even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.* Thus we see how expressly the word of God declares the universal salvation of mankind to be his will and purpose, and what will assuredly take place.

Now, if it be true that Scripture agrees with itself and with reason, it is evident that we must understand every dispensation of the Almighty as corresponding with the great end he has in view, the universal salvation of his creatures. The pain and sufferings of the world to come cannot, without doing violence to reason and Scripture, be separated from this great scheme which Almighty wisdom has planned, and must therefore be means of salvation to the reprobate---real chastisements, inflicted for their

conversion and amendment ; consequently, by the word *eternal* we are not to understand an infinite, but a limited, though probably, to some, a very long duration.

The ancient covenant, made with Abraham and his posterity, was peculiar to the Jewish nation, and excluded every other. It was to serve as the foundation of that new and better covenant, which the Divine Being designed of universal extent, and to which it was to give place. This new and universal covenant with all nations, by which the gentiles should be called, and the heathen become an inheritance, is repeatedly foretold in the prophetic books. It is therefore a truth, founded on the records of that ancient covenant, that its duration was intended only for a season, and that it should give place to another. It is, nevertheless, together with its rites and ceremonies, repeatedly called *eternal*; and if an infinite duration is to be understood by that term, the Old and New Testament are in opposition to each other ; nay, the former is in a state of disagreement with itself. How therefore do divines, in every communion

of Christians, adjust this difficulty? They agree to take reason for their guide, and very justly and rationally decide, that the word *eternal* only implies a long, but limited duration, and that nothing more was meant, than the continuance of the ancient covenant, till it had answered the important purposes for which it was established, of preparing the way for another and universal covenant, by which it was to be abrogated.

Now this method of reasoning, so just and satisfactory, is not more natural in this instance, than in its application to future punishments: For since the word of God, which brings to man the glad tidings of eternal salvation, at the same time calls future sufferings eternal, it is clear that, by a parity of reason with that already quoted, we are not to understand that word in its absolute sense, as it would thereby be in manifest contradiction with the revealed will of our Maker; but that we are to take it in a sense agreeable to the word of God, to what we know of his nature, and to the powers and faculties which he has given us for our direction; and this we shall do, if we admit that it implies a permanence and

perpetuity, till such time as, by the destruction of sin and the conversion of the sinner, the paternal views of our Creator shall be fulfilled.

There remains, *lastly*, and under the *fifth* head, yet one remarkable text, where the Lord Jesus Christ himself gives the name of chastisement to future punishment--*these*, says he, speaking of the wicked, *shall go away into everlasting punishment*. Now, though the word punishment is made use of in our version, in the original the word *κολασις* is peculiarly applicable to the pruning of trees, which therefore implies correction or chastisement, and was in use to express that correction by which men were made better, like to trees which have undergone the operation of pruning, or lopping off the dead or unfruitful branches.

In my preliminary discourse, I promised to cite no human authorities in proof of what I should advance; hitherto I have adhered to reason and Scripture; but, as in this particular instance, I cannot quote the latter in the vulgar tongue, I am obliged to have recourse to the original, and to

prove to my reader, by such authorities as cannot be suspected, that the Greek word *κολασις* signifies *chastisement*: And these authorities, so respectable, are two learned divines; one, the illustrious Grotius, in his Rights of War and Peace; the other, the celebrated Wytttenbach, in his Essay on Doctrinal Theology. Grotius says expressly, that “the kind of punishment which tends to the improvement of the criminal, is what the philosophers called, among other things, *κολασις*, or *chastisement*.”* And Wytttenbach, who writes this passage from Grotius, says, that “God, in the infliction of sufferings, has three ends in view, the first of which is the correction of the offender, in order to his future amendment: And that the Greeks frequently gave to such sufferings the name *κολασις*.”

Thus we see, from unquestionable evidence, that the Son of God himself calls future punishment chastisement: Now a never ending chastisement is a contradiction

* *Droit de la Guerre et de la Paix, de la traduction de Barbyrac. L. v. 11. chap. 20. sect. 7.*

in terms; the word *eternal* must therefore, in that connection, signify a long and dreadful correction, which will never cease till sin is subdued, and the heart of the sinner disposed and properly prepared to experience the efficacy of divine redemption; that power of God, whereby the Son was sent to be the Saviour of the world, that he, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man---not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

If then the sufferings of a future state are so dreadful by their duration, they are not less so by their nature. Let us not infer, from the word *chastisement*, made use of by our Saviour, that the torments of hell will bear any resemblance to the corrections of the present world, otherwise than as both are intended to promote the same salutary end; for in every other respect, both in degree and duration, they will be so entirely different, that in the original language of the New Testament, they do not even bear the same names. Scripture, describing the chastisements of this life, in the epistle to the Hebrews, makes use of the Greek word *παιδία*, which signifies the correction of a

child, which is inflicted with the rod. *Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth* (or strikes with the rod) *every son whom he receiveth.* But the great and terrible chastisements of a future state are expressed by another word, and one that expresses, as I have already said, a long and severe chastisement with a two-edged sword, which will cut to the quick, in order to sever and lop off every dead and corrupted branch.

Such are some of the principal declarations of Scripture, which contain the third proof of this great truth, That the punishments which the Divine Being inflicts on the wicked hereafter, are so many corrections to bring about their conversion, and are real chastisements. * Each of these re-

* The common assertion, That sin being an offence against an infinite Being, constitutes an infinite guilt, and therefore incurs endless punishment, as a satisfaction to divine justice, is, in every point, of view inadmissible.

1/. It defeats its own end—For if justice requires, in order to satisfy it, the eternal punishment of the sinner, it can never be satisfied at all; consequently the all wise God institutes a dispensation by which no good end can be effected. To the sinner it is not pretended that any good can arise, as their sufferings shall ne-

spectable declarations, taken independent of the rest, as they proceed from the God of all truth, ought to be of sufficient weight for our conviction : But what transcendant

ver come to a period : And it is equally evident, that after the lapse of numberless ages, justice is as far from being satisfied as at the commencement of their sufferings, there being no proportion between finite and infinite : Its end must therefore be for ever unattained.

But *2dly*. This argument appears to depend on a misconception of the nature of justice. Punitive justice has for its object the prevention of crimes, and the reclaiming of the criminal. When punishment is inflicted merely upon the principle of retaliation, it is not justice, but revenge—a passion belonging to the carnal mind, which we are commanded to mortify: Yet this is what has been ascribed to God, under the specious name of justice. That revenge can have no place in the Divine Mind, is evident from this single consideration, that he is not affected with either the obedience or disobedience of his creatures, and therefore can have no injury to resent. His aim is to reclaim the sinner ; and when judgment turns men to righteousness, his justice is satisfied, as is evident from 1 John i. 9. “ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” What would any wise or good man think of that jurisprudence which increased and perpetuated crimes, and raised insuperable bars to the reclaiming of offenders ?—*Edit.*

light must result from their union ! Let us endeavour to collect their scattered rays into one focus, and let that focus be our heart, that, by their lively ardour, each of us may be animated by divine love.

Oh Eternal Father of us all ! Thine anger then endures but for a moment, because thy severity is only one of the means by which thine infinite wisdom leads us to thee ; *but in thy favour is life*, an eternity of life, to the end that thou mightest have mercy upon all. It is for this reason that thou wilt not always chide, nor reject for ever, because of the souls thou hast made, lest they should fail before thee ; for thou wilt not abandon the work of thine hands. Conformable, then, to the immutable designs of thine all-powerful will, thou wilt perfect that which concerns us, so as in the end to be the Saviour of all without exception : yes ; even the Saviour of those who are now the slaves of sin, and hardened so as to resist every gentle method which thy grace employs for their sanctification. For such thou hast prepared a last and terrible expedient, to be exercised only if need be, a rigorous---an eternal---in a word, a just chastisement,

proportioned, both in degree and duration, to the resistance and obduracy of the unhappy sinners who have incurred it. But to preserve us from incurring this tremendous punishment, thou hast given thy well-beloved Son, and hast constituted him our king and our judge, that he may reduce to thine empire such among us as resist thee, may break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel; and when, by these means, their hearts are broken and humbled, then will this Saviour, this High Priest, this King, bring them all to dwell with thee in thy high and holy place: And thus, having finished the work which thou gavest him to do, he will surrender at thy feet the sceptre which, for this important purpose, thou hast given him, and will deliver up the kingdom to thee, that thou mayest be all in all.

I think we may now conclude, that we have established a fundamental principle whence to form consistent ideas of the justice and severity of God, who punishes the wicked that he may bless them, by turning them every one from their iniquities. How different from that implacable severity,

which, under the specious title of justice, would be insatiable vengeance, infinite cruelty, incompatible with goodness !

If we allow that severity is a branch of goodness, it will set that amiable attribute in its true light, and prevent us from falling into the dangerous illusion of expecting nothing from divine love but mercies and favours. We should not only consider the end, but the means of conducting us to felicity, which will be severe upon every soul of man that doeth evil. The goodness of the Deity is as enlightened as it is infinite ; it is a goodness inseparable from wisdom, and consequently firm, and exempt from such false compassion as arises from weakness--an inflexible, an inexorable goodness, which, without being influenced by our cries and supplications, will complete its designs ; in a word, a just and real goodness, which will treat us in a way suitable to our moral state, and by which the sufferings that are to elevate us to supreme happiness, are as certain as the infinite goodness of God itself.

But if divine justice is so formidable a branch of goodness, it is not less comfortable to be assured, that we can never be called

to endure any suffering which is not dispensed by the paternal goodness of the Lord ---that our fruit will be unto holiness, and the end everlasting life---and that a time will come, when we shall bless and praise him for our chastisements, as for the most real and salutary favours. Let us therefore conclude this long paragraph with the proposition with which we entered upon it, That the infinite justice of God, far from opposing his goodness, is in itself a branch, formidable indeed, but nevertheless an important and interesting branch of divine goodness.

I come next to consider the infinite *authority* of God, which, far from being contrary to, is entirely founded upon goodness.

This authority consists in the absolute and unlimited right which the Supreme Being has of disposing of us and of our actions. By the first of these rights, he can deal with us as he pleases; and by the second, has an undoubted right to our obedience in whatever he commands. In virtue of this double right, which constitutes his supreme au-

thority, he is our sovereign lord, and our absolute master. Such is the infinite authority of God, than which it is not possible to conceive any greater.

To these two rights on the part of God, two obligations follow on ours. The first is, our humble and entire acquiescence in every thing he sees fit to dispense ; and the second, our faithful and willing obedience to all his commands ; which obligation is as extensive and as unlimited on our part, as the authority of God itself. In virtue of this obligation we are his servants---his slaves, whose only lot must ever be submission and obedience. Such is our entire dependence with respect to God in virtue of his authority, that it is impossible to conceive a stronger obligation.

Let us now examine the foundation of this authority ; for the divine authority, as it is real, must be established on some good reason, as its incontestible proof and title. All authority, destitute of such foundation, is chimerical, and the unjust claim of usurpation. Reason and Scripture agree in making the act of creation the foundation of this divine prerogative. Reason tells us,

that to God belongs, and on his good pleasure must depend, every thing he has made, and that the Creator of the universe must be its Lord. Scripture informs us, that *the Most High God is the possessor of heaven and earth---*that *the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof---*and in Ezekiel, *Behold all souls are mine.* Thus, in the hundredth psalm, the inhabitants of the earth are called upon to rejoice, *because the Lord hath made them, and not they themselves.* And lastly, to shew that creation is the title of this authority, Scripture farther represents it under the image of a potter, who fashions the clay according to his will. We find in Jeremiah a remarkable parable to this purpose: God having sent the prophet to go down to the potter's house, where the vessel that he had made being marred in his hand, he made it again another vessel, as seemed good unto him; upon which the prophet was commanded to speak to the people, saying, *O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel.* It is impossible to express

more strongly the absolute authority of our Maker, in consequence of our being the work of his hands.

Mankind are generally agreed on this subject, yet they strangely pervert the truth, by opposing this authority to infinite goodness. For in the divine authority they discover reason to justify the infinite misery of the reprobate, and maintain, that as the authority of God is infinite and unlimited, he has a right to inflict on them never ending torments; and in order to silence every expostulation, the words of St Paul are applied to this subject-- *Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?* Thus doth a truth ill understood lead to the most absurd consequences.

It is therefore of the last importance to shew, that the barbarous right attributed to the Almighty, of rendering his creatures infinitely wretched, is a right absolutely impossible in its very nature, and consequently we do not lessen the divine authority, by excluding from it this pretended, this hor-

rid right, as I hope to prove upon farther examination.

If then the authority of God arises from the act of creation, let us consider what there can be in this act that may serve as a just foundation of this infinite authority. In the act of creation I can distinguish but two things---the almighty power which formed us, and the will which led him to create us. The divine authority must be the result of the one or the other of these. Now it is evident, that power alone, considered in itself, can never be the foundation of divine authority. The idea of power and strength, and that of authority and right, have no natural connection. A being may have sufficient strength and power to subject me to his pleasure, but this alone can never give him any right; if, therefore, he has any real authority over me, it must be derived from some other source; for power alone is the pretended right of an usurper, similar to that of the beasts of the forest. This is a proposition so clear, that all demonstration would tend to obscure it:---No one will ever dispute it; I may therefore propose it

as an axiom, That the reason of superior strength is no reason at all ; or that power alone can confer no just right of authority.

It is therefore in the will we are to seek for the foundation of that supreme authority which the Divine Being possesses over his creatures. Now that will, which from nothing caused us to be, was the first act of infinite goodness, and arose from the pure principle of benevolence and love. It is that which has constituted the Creator the tender parent of all, and is the pledge of that happiness which, issuing from him, must in the end fill with felicity every intellectual nature. Ah ! when I contemplate the Being of beings, under the interesting view in which creation places him ; when I view him as a faithful Creator, as an eternal and gracious Father, who gave me existence that he might give me happiness, I am not at a loss to discern the foundation of his infinite authority ; I see that it is the right of rendering me happy in the way best suited to my nature, and by the means best adapted to the end. I then perceive the strongest and most intimate obligation on my part, to submit blindly and without reserve to this

authority; because in my nature I find a constant thirst after supreme happiness. I see the folly and extravagance of ever complaining of the dispensations or laws of an infinitely wise Being---the presumption, in a weak and ignorant creature, of deciding on the means by which its happiness is to be procured. *Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker: Let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth. But shall the clay say to him that fashioned it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me.*

Since then the infinite authority of God over his creatures, is his unlimited right of conferring happiness in his own way, let us never ascribe to that prerogative the right of rendering them for ever miserable. Whatever frail mortals may pretend, this right is absolutely impossible in itself, because revolting from nature. Creation, which is an act of goodness, could not confer it; for to create for the purpose of infinite misery, would be an act so unjust, so cruel and ty-

rannical, that we cannot conceive a being capable of it; it would be contrary to that very nature of which God himself is the author; and, in a word, is absolutely impossible. It is not on any such principle that our heavenly Father reasons with us concerning that authority founded on creation, since he alleges that very act as the reason why he will not contend for ever, or be always wroth, as I have already shewn in quoting that text.

From what has been said, therefore, we may discern the nature of that authority which the Divine Being possesses over us as our Creator,--a right not properly the offspring of power, but of infinite and unmerited love. By this act of paternal goodness, he has given us the pledge, the sure and certain pledge of its eternal exercise, directed by that wisdom, and attended by that power, which are alone capable of employing the means necessary for securing our perfection and felicity; and if our natural desire of happiness leads us to accept existence as a precious benefit, the same nature lays us under the strongest obligation to acknowledge this infinite authority, by

receiving all its dispensations and laws with the most cheerful and profound submission, since the infinite authority of our Creator, far from being contrary to infinite goodness, is entirely founded upon it.

Our next consideration relates to the infinite *majesty* of the Supreme Being, which, far from being contrary to, is built upon goodness, as its firm and eternal foundation.

When we consider the Divine Being in himself, and independent of any will to his creatures, he presents himself to our astonished imagination in the infinite grandeur of supreme majesty. What then is this supreme majesty? It is the splendour arising from the union of all the divine perfections, as the *first*, the *intelligent and powerful cause of the universe*.

As the *first cause of the universe*, we behold in God the Being of beings, whose glorious attributes are all eternal, independent, immutable, infinite, and necessary, as is his nature and existence. What grandeur; what majesty is here!

As the *intelligent, and powerful cause of the universe*, we behold God as an eye, per-

vading, enlightening, penetrating the immensity of space, and the revolutions of time. We see an all-powerful arm, which nothing can resist, and which holds all things under its direction. By these two perfections, which are infinite, we may conceive the omnipresence of God, that immensity which fills heaven and earth.

Such is the infinite majesty of God. How feeble is language; how defective every term by which we try to express our thoughts on this sublime subject! Our thoughts themselves, our most elevated conceptions, alas! what are they on a subject so marvellous, which absorbs and confounds every finite intelligence! *O Lord my God, thou art very great, thou art clothed with honour and majesty; who coverest thyself with light as with a garment; who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain. Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord; who can shew forth all his praise? His greatness is unsearchable!*

When I contemplate the divine majesty in itself, when I behold a necessarily existent being, a being immutable and infinite, whose knowledge, power and presence are

universal and unlimited, I am filled with a respect, a veneration bordering on apprehension and terror, which leads me to exclaim with the Psalmist, *What is man, O Lord, that thou art mindful of him; or the son of man, that thou visitest him!* But when, to these ideas, I join those arising from infinite goodness; when I remember that the Being infinitely great, is as infinitely and as necessarily good, my soul, no longer terrified and appalled, considers the majesty of the Deity in its most interesting aspect; it beholds a being necessary in all his attributes, consequently infinite and immutable in goodness---an eye from which no darkness can hide; but a paternal eye, from which nothing conducive to my happiness can escape, and by whom the very hairs of my head are numbered---an all-powerful, but at the same time, a paternal arm, stretched out for my defence, and able to perfect that which concerns me, all that shall be necessary to secure my happiness. How delightful thus to unite the goodness of God to his majesty! From this union results the most perfect idea we can possibly form of the divine nature. The majesty of God is

all that he is, considered in himself ; and the goodness of God, all that he is, considered in relation to his creatures ; and both are so intimately connected, that whatever tends to exalt the splendour of his adorable majesty, does not less elevate our ideas of his ineffable goodness.

But not withstanding this intimate union of majesty and goodness in God, human prejudices have been fertile in discovering means of placing them in opposition ; for what cannot prejudice accomplish ? The necessity of finding, in the Supreme Being, something to justify the infliction of never-ending torments on the wicked, has given rise to this contradiction, and led to this absurd reasoning---Every sin, will some say, is committed against God, and consequently against infinite majesty. From this indisputable truth they proceed to draw the following conclusion : That all sin, even in the most minute degree, deserves infinite punishment, because committed against infinite majesty. I lament the necessity I am under seriously to refute so miserable an argument. But weak as is this reasoning, it is, nevertheless, held by many honest, upright, and in

every other respect, intelligent and cultivated minds. What! *All sin deserve infinite punishment*, because committed against infinite majesty! Should we not, instead of refuting such an argument, perceive at the first glance that it refutes itself, and proves nothing, because it proves infinitely too much? A being who merits infinite punishment is a being infinitely culpable; a being infinitely culpable, is a being infinitely wicked; and a being infinitely wicked, is a being infinite. Thus is the sinner---mortal man---a being so weak and finite, by the help of this argument, transformed into an infinite being! Thus we see the fallacy of an argument which leads to such absurd and irrational conclusions.

But I will go farther, and shew, that no sin whatever can deserve infinite punishment.

I admit that all sin is committed against God, and consequently against infinite majesty. It is this which properly constitutes its great malignity. Sin is a will in man opposed to the will of God; and this character alone were sufficient to discover to us

its odious, its fatal, its presumptuous and extravagant nature. It is this character of sin which Scripture has in view, when it represents the carnal mind as enmity against God, and gives to sinners the appellation of enemies of God ; because a state of sin is a state of rebellion against our Maker.

But though all sin bears this odious character, and is committed against infinite majesty, nevertheless there is in all sin an essential circumstance, which renders the offender more or less criminal before God. This essential circumstance is the degree of knowledge which the sinner has of God and of his will, so that a man is rendered more or less culpable, in proportion to the greater or less extent of his knowledge. As this is a principle of common sense which I believe no one contests, I shall **not** dwell upon it, or even refer my readers **to the** many passages of Scripture which assert it, because it is impossible they should be ignorant of them; but proceed to shew, that no sin whatever can deserve infinite punishment, unless we can suppose a thing impossible, which is, that the sinner is possessed of an infinite knowledge of God and of his will.

Besides, let us call to mind, whenever we speak of the sufferings inflicted by the Divine Being, that they can only be chastisements for the sinner; and that a chastisement without end is a contradiction in terms, and inconsistent with the ideas we ought to form of the all-perfect nature of the Deity.

But if sin cannot merit infinite punishment, let us see what the suffering is which it does deserve. The principle which I have just been recalling to the recollection of my reader will enable him to discern, that if divine punishments are chastisements, every sin will deserve sufferings as great and as durable as are necessary for the destruction of sin, and the conversion of the sinner.

It is therefore certain, there can be nothing in the infinite majesty of God, which can ever stop the course of his infinite goodness. The majesty of God is the union of all those glorious attributes which shine forth in him as the first, the intelligent, and powerful cause of the universe. Thus the majesty of God consists in his necessary, his independent, his eternal, and immutable existence; in his goodness, his wisdom, and

his infinite power. Such are the glorious attributes which constitute supreme majesty and grandeur, and which render the Being who is possessed of them perfectly sufficient and independent, having nothing either to hope or fear from any outward cause. To such a Being, therefore, and to such alone, can absolutely and exclusively belong a perfect disinterestedness in all he does; he alone can possess, in the supreme degree, what among men is called generosity and magnanimity---the most sublime, the most glorious qualities by which an intelligent creature can ever resemble the Creator. It belongs to God alone to be great in goodness, and to act always, and in every case, from pure love to his creatures; for who but such a being is possessed of knowledge capable of discerning, and power to execute all that can constitute the happiness of his creatures? In a word, he cannot be a Being of infinite majesty, unless he is a Being of infinite goodness. Repentment, vengeance, hatred, and cruelty, were ever the wretched offspring of little minds, of weak and cowardly souls, of those depraved and corrupted beings who are the shameful sport

of their base and unruly passions. True magnanimity, such as belongs to him who is truly great, knows none of those degrading and animal emotions, and never experiences any but the noble and generous sentiments of clemency, of love, and of beneficence. How far are we, alas! from honouring the Deity, when, under pretence of vindicating the rights of his offended majesty, we attribute to him sentiments that would disgrace a frail mortal. To honour God in a manner becoming his perfections, let us acknowledge with joy this precious and interesting truth, That he is infinitely good, and in consequence of that infinitely great. When, therefore, in the preceding chapter, I undertook to establish the infinite goodness of the Supreme Being, I began by separately proving those perfections which constitute his supreme majesty, from whence I deduced his infinite goodness.

We may therefore conclude this paragraph, by asserting, that the infinite majesty of God rests upon his goodness, as upon a firm and unshaken foundation; because all the attributes which compose the divine

majesty are eternal and immutable. As long, therefore, as the Deity shall be necessarily existent, independent, eternal, and immutable ; as long as he shall continue infinitely wise and powerful, so long will he remain infinitely good : And thus *the infinite majesty of God, far from being contrary to, is built upon goodness, as its firm and eternal foundation.*

The *glory* of God, instead of requiring any thing contrary to his infinite goodness, is highly interested in its eternal exercise.

The divine glory is not any single attribute of the Supreme Being, but that resplendent lustre which arises from the union of all his adorable perfections, and may be defined, *the striking manifestation which the Deity vouchsafes to make of himself and of his perfections to his creatures, in nature and in revelation.* All the works of God, whether respecting the creation and government of the universe, or the redemption and salvation of the human race, bear the mark of his glorious attributes, and are stamped with the character of his adorable perfections : For in nature, *The heavens declare*

the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth forth his handy-work---the whole earth is full of his glory. In the great work of redeeming love, Scripture informs us, *That the Son of God, the author and finisher of our faith, is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person:---the gospel, the glorious gospel of Christ; and the redemption he came to accomplish is represented, in the epistle to the Ephesians, as being to the praise of the glory of his grace.* Thus what one prophet calls *the knowledge of the Lord*, another calls *the knowledge of the glory of the Lord*; because it is in the knowledge of the Lord that his glory consists, agreeable to the definition I have given.

If then the glory of God is the resplendent and universal manifestation of all his perfections, all that glory requires is, that the Divine Being should be known to his intelligent creatures as he is; and therefore it can never require any thing contrary to his infinite goodness. Nevertheless, by a strange perversion of ideas, means have been found of opposing the glory of God to his goodness, and this from the necessity of assigning a reason for the infinite misery of

the reprobate. Whoever admits eternal torments, cannot possibly attribute to his Maker a design of saving the whole human race ; but as a Being supremely wise, must propose to himself some end in all he does, so has the glory of God been selected as the end and purpose of all his actions. What a solecism is here ! for in separating the glory of God from the happiness of his creatures, it becomes impossible to prove that all he does is with a view to his glory. This, however, when rightly understood, is a principle I am far from rejecting, but consider as a sublime and sacred truth, as I shall evince hereafter. But this principle, when in the hands of those of whom I am speaking, becomes a convenient mode of plausibly accounting for the infinite misery of the reprobate. The Divine Being, will such argue, does all things for his glory ; that is, to manifest his perfections in a striking manner. Thus at the great day of universal judgment, the goodness and justice of God will be displayed in his paternal love to the righteous, and his tremendous justice to the wicked. Thus far we agree to the truth of this proposition. But they proceed to

disguise the nature of divine justice, by supposing it to consist in such severity as can only belong to vengeance and cruelty. They conclude, that as the infinite goodness of God will be manifested in the eternal salvation of the elect, so will his justice be displayed in the endless misery of the reprobate; and that as his divine glory requires the manifestation of his infinite justice, it requires the infinite misery of the wicked.

Let us stop to behold the fatal influence of one error, how it corrupts and perverts the sublimest truths. The example before us is striking. All the propositions here laid down are so many sacred and solemn truths. But whether do they lead? Alas! when contaminated by the admission of one fatal error, they conduct those of whom I am speaking to the most horrid conclusion that can possibly be drawn; *That the honour and glory of a Being infinitely good, requires him to shew himself, in effect, infinitely cruel and implacable!* How strange, O my God! how inconceivably strange, to make thy glory consist in what most dishonours thy great name.

In asserting this, do we affirm that truth leads to error? No; truth in its purity can never conduct to falsehood, since every consequence which flows from a true principle is as evidently true as the principle which gave rise to it. But the introduction of a single error, of one false idea, is sufficient to infect and pervert a long chain of truths, each of which, by being allied and incorporated with it, partakes of its falsehood, in as much as it conveys ideas opposite to truth; and thus it is in the case before us. The mind, accustomed to attribute to the Divine Being the infliction of endless torments on creatures who exist only by his irresistible will, seeks in him some perfection whereby to lessen the horror of an idea as much opposed to divine goodness as darkness to light. To this erroneous idea they give the awful and sacred name of *justice*, place it among the divine attributes, and never fail to present it under this false appearance, so that the propositions just stated, though true in themselves, become affected by the association, and lead to the terrible conclusion, That the glory of God requires the infinite misery of the reprobate.

To change the face of things, we need therefore only refute this erroneous idea of divine justice, which I have laboured to effect in the preceding paragraph, and I hope not without success. To that definition I refer my reader, and to the consequences which flow from it, which we will now apply to our subject. If justice is a branch of divine goodness; and rigour, merciful severity, with a view to the correction and amendment of the sufferer, it is evident that the glory of God, though it requires the punishment of the wicked at the great day, requires nothing contrary to infinite goodness, as the exercise of that severe justice is at the same time a manifestation of his goodness.

It would be treating this interesting subject too slightly were I to stop here: I must go yet farther, and demonstrate, that the glory of God is sovereignly interested in the eternal exercise of his infinite goodness. Three considerations offer themselves in support of this truth; and I flatter myself my readers will not think the discussion they require tedious.

The first consideration results from the definition of divine glory: For if this con-

sists in the illustrious manifestation which the Supreme Being makes of all his admirable perfections, it is necessary to that glory, that he should be known as he really is. Now, God is love, pure disinterested benevolence. To know him therefore as he is, we must contemplate him in the character of infinite goodness, and in nothing derogatory to it. The glory of the divine nature requires, therefore, the display of an unchangeable, inexhaustible, universal, and eternal goodness to all his creatures. It is thus that the glory of God shines forth in the works of nature, where *he leaves not himself without a witness in that he does good; giving us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, and filling our hearts with food and gladness.* But if we read this truth inscribed on the works of nature, in what lively characters does it stand expressed in the volume of his grace, where the Father of mercies *saves not his own Son, but delivers him up to death* for us, together with the most solemn assurance, *that he will with him freely give us all things !*

But it may be asked, Does not the glory of God require the manifestation of his other

perfections? Certainly, as it results from their union. But in the exercise of divine goodness, do we not see infinite wisdom directing, infinite power executing? Do we not see divine goodness, under the name of holiness, promulgating the most perfect laws for our improvement and happiness? and does it not assume the formidable appellation of justice, that by chastisements it may accomplish the destruction of sin, that enemy of our peace, and induce us to a cordial and habitual obedience to all the divine commands? And O! what heart can conceive; what tongue can express the praises due to such exalted glory, when all these adorable perfections shall be fully manifested to every creature; sin conquered, and sinners become holy, perfect and happy! Their hearts penetrated with love and gratitude, will for ever adore the author of their existence and felicity, before whose throne will eternally ascend the grateful homage of their thanksgiving and praise, which shall resound through the mansions of celestial glory for ever and ever.

The second consideration, by which I mean to shew, that the divine glory is interested in the eternal exercise of infinite

goodness, is, that his glory is inseparable from the happiness of every intelligent being. If the perfect glory of God arises from the perfect knowledge of his perfections, this knowledge must become universal to every creature, in order to the complete manifestation of his glory. Now it is impossible that beings should arrive at the knowledge of God without in some measure resembling him. To know God as he is, is to behold him as infinitely amiable, and to view him as infinitely amiable, is to love him with our whole heart; and is not this to be good, perfect, and happy, and to be imitators of him? St John speaks the same language, when he says, *we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*. It is, therefore, as certain that all men will, sooner or later, arrive at perfection and happiness, as it is certain that the Divine Being will render his knowledge and glory universal. And what heart is not transported with the most perfect joy, in the view of a futurity so interesting and certain; of a futurity which shall unite the perfect glory of God, and the complete felicity of every creature. And can we ever doubt that when the Supreme Being is employed

in the advancement of his glory, he will not, at the same time, by his infinite goodness, work in us to will and to do of his good pleasure?

The third and last consideration on this subject is, That the glory of the Creator depends upon the perfection of his creatures, as the honour of the worker arises from the perfection of his work. Can any thing, on this principle, be more contrary to the glory of God, than the infinite misery of the reprobate---a multitude of intelligent and immortal beings, whose nature and state will be in eternal contradiction the one to the other? For with natures capable of happiness, and desires ardently directed towards it, their eternal portion must be the most horrid and unremitting agony. Description falls infinitely short of the terrible idea; but reason tells us, were we free from prejudice, that it can never advance the glory of the Creator.

If, as some pretend, the reprobate remain for ever in a hardened and obdurate state, what do we behold, but a race of beings for ever devoted to crimes and sufferings, on whom almighty power confers eternal exist-

ence, well knowing it will be employed in perpetuating sin and misery ! If we are to frame our ideas of the worker from his works, how formidable must those be, which are received from the representation of a multitude of wicked and unhappy beings, plunged for ever in all the horrors of sin, of blasphemy, of agony, rage, and despair !

If we admit, with others, that the reprobate are capable of sincere repentance, but that it will be unavailing, because the final and irrevocable doom is pronounced against them ; this supposition relieves us at least from one contradiction which the former contained ; for thus at least sin will not last for ever, and intelligent creatures will not be eternally wicked, in defiance of a nature which came perfect from the hands of the Creator ; but if it obviates one difficulty, it raises another from which the former was exempt, which is, that those beings, penitent and converted, will then for ever aspire at an approach to God as their sovereign good---will for ever implore his mercy and forgiveness ; while God, on his part, though the Father of mercies, will eternally repulse and

reject them, and refuse *to be exalted, by having mercy upon them*, but leave them a prey to the most cruel sufferings. And here again were we, as we are commanded in Scripture, to judge of the Worker by his work, to what conclusions should we not be led? What ideas should we form of the parent of a numerous family, who would turn from the supplications of his penitent children, and who, possessing the ample means of rendering them perfectly and lastingly happy, should be for ever deaf to their entreaties, and inflict upon them unterminating misery?

Which ever way, therefore, we behold the reprobate in eternal misery; whether as obstinate sinners, or as penitent offenders, we cannot help discovering their state to be in contradiction to the infinite goodness of the divine nature, and consequently absolutely impossible.

The painful object we have been contemplating, requires us to turn our thoughts once more back upon the delightful contrast of goodness infinite, which will leave no being in the universe a final prey to wickedness and misery, but will accomplish his work, by en-

lightning their understanding, rectifying their will, rooting out every vicious habit, destroying every evil propensity, and to effect this, employing every mean of gentleness and severity, that his wisdom shall see necessary, till he has at length banished evil from the universe, and rendered all its intelligent inhabitants good and happy. What a prospect ! But sublime and delightful as it is, it cannot be exaggerated, because it is our Creator, the best as well as greatest of beings, our eternal Father, who is to complete the astonishing work---he who commands us *to love him with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind*, because he is worthy of this absolute love and confidence. How happy is the universe to be subject to his government ! What gladness should we feel ; what songs of triumph should we raise ; how should the earth rejoice, that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth ; and that under his sway we may rest assured, that no moral evil will ever exist which shall not be destroyed, nor any physical evil which is not intended as a remedy, whereby moral agents may attain to perfection and felicity, to the

immortal glory of the Being infinitely good!

Let us then, with the delightful sentiment arising from perfect conviction, draw this conclusion from all that has been said, *That the glory of God, far from requiring any thing contrary to his infinite goodness, is, in the highest degree, interested in its eternal exercise.*

Having thus completed the examination of those several perfections in the divine nature which have been opposed to infinite goodness, I hope it will appear with perfect evidence, that neither the liberty, the holiness, or the justice of the Divine Being; neither his authority, his Majesty, or his glory, can in any instance whatever contradict or oppose his infinite and adorable goodness, of which these several perfections may be said to be branches, and, from their strict and intimate connection, throw new light upon the principal subject of this work.---But as the above discussion has been long, it will require the following recapitulation.

The infinite liberty of God secures to his creatures the perfect and eternal exercise of

his infinite goodness ; because this liberty consists in an absolute exemption from all restraint, and a freedom to execute every design and purpose of his goodness without impediment.

The infinite holiness of the divine nature is a capital and delightful branch of infinite goodness ; it is that will of the Supreme Being which requires the moral perfection of sinners, because absolutely necessary to their happiness ; and which hates sin with a perfect hatred, as the obstacle of their felicity, because his love to the sinner is infinite.

The infinite justice of God is another, and a formidable branch of infinite goodness, since from it we are assured of the constant dispensation of whatever is best adapted to our moral state ; and consequently, that we shall not escape the infliction of such sufferings as his wisdom shall see necessary for our conversion and salvation, however dreadful in degree, or lasting in duration.

The infinite authority of God is entirely founded on his infinite goodness ; for it is the absolute and unlimited right which the Deity possesses, as Creator, of governing his creatures, and leading them to happiness by

such means as he sees most proper and efficacious.

The majesty of God is the firm and unshaken foundation of his infinite goodness ; for the supreme majesty of the Most High speaks him a being absolutely self-sufficient, totally disinterested in all his actions, and consequently incapable of any other motive than the happiness of his creatures. This majesty also consists in the various perfections of the divine nature ; and as all those attributes are immutable and eternal, the divine majesty must ever remain the foundation of infinite goodness.

And lastly, *the glory of the Supreme Being is sovereignly interested in the eternal exercise of his infinite goodness ;* for in order to the true manifestation of this glory, the goodness of God must appear what it really is, infinite ; or, in other words, unchangeable, inexhaustible, universal, and eternal ; which necessarily leads to the display of the divine wisdom and power, of holiness and justice, and renders the perfect glory of God inseparable from his knowledge, and from the perfection and happiness of his creatures,

as the glory of the worker arises from the perfection of his work.

Such is the substance of all that has been advanced on each of these heads, the result of which is, That all the sublime perfections of God, as they exist in him, and in the manner they are displayed to his creatures, far from containing any contradiction or opposition to each other, are in a constant and beautiful harmony, and admirably conspire jointly to spread perfection and happiness throughout the universe; confirming the second consequence arising from infinite goodness, That it is absolutely impossible any thing should be found in God contrary thereto.

As the earnestness with which I have been endeavouring to establish this important truth has led me to present it in every point of view which could tend to its elucidation, disengage it from the fatal mists of errors, and raise it victorious and triumphant from the chaos of prejudice and misapprehension; I fear I may have been led into repetitions unnecessary to the candid; but not void of use to such as have been long prejudiced in favour of contrary opinions.

Let us now proceed to our third consequence---*Every act of the Divine Being is an act of infinite goodness.*

A few words will be sufficient to evince the truth of this proposition. Every act of the Divine Being is an act of his will: Now, as his will is infinitely and perfectly good, every act of his will must be an act of his goodness, as I have already shewn at large, from reason and Scripture, in explaining those words of St John, *God is love*, where the apostle gives us the most admirable definition possible of the divine will; for the seat of love and benevolence resides not in the understanding, but in the will. In treating this subject, therefore, I proved that the eternal and immutable essence of the divine will was love for his creatures---the will of rendering them happy: He has no other will but this, none different, none contrary; in a word, his will is love and goodness; for God is love---which gives rise to the third consequence, That every act of God is an act of his infinite goodness.

As this proposition is important, I must neglect nothing to make it, if possible, yet more evident: To place it in the strongest

light, I will compare the will of an intelligent creature with the will of the Creator. A created intelligence, however perfect his nature, and elevated his rank in the scale of being, is nevertheless a finite being, and thence capable of advancement in knowledge, in excellence, in perfection, and happiness. The goodness, therefore, of such a being, great as it may be, is nevertheless limited; for wanting self-sufficiency, he cannot be perfectly disinterested. Two different motives will, by turns, overrule the determinations of his will---his own advantage or that of others; and whenever these shall be found in opposition, it is natural that the balance of his will should preponderate in favour of his own interest. Nay more; whenever such a being is called upon generously to forego his own immediate advantage, he needs the encouraging promise of a future glorious reward to animate him to the noble sacrifice. So true is it, that created beings are in some degree indigent, and can never entirely divest themselves of a desire to promote their self-happiness.

But it cannot be thus with God: A Being perfectly independent, immutable, and

infinite, can never, in any single instance, be determined by motives of self-advantage, because it would imply a contradiction to his nature, to suppose such a Being had any thing to acquire. The motive, the only motive by which the divine will can be influenced, is the happiness of his creatures: He alone possesses such supreme goodness, and therefore it was that our Saviour declared, *There is none good but one, that is God.*

But in order to confirm the truth of our third consequence, That every act of the Divine Being is an act of his goodness, let us have recourse to the authority of Scripture, where we are told, that *the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works*---that *he is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.* And when St Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, speaks of the perfect will of God, we are undoubtedly to understand, that all his acts are acts of goodness. It is also worthy of particular notice, that the same apostle, writing to the Ephesians concerning the salvation declared by Jesus Christ, calls it *the good pleasure*

of the divine *will* ; and in his epistle to the Thessalonians the same is expressed as *the good pleasure of his goodness*, substituting the word *goodness* for *will*, because in effect they are one and the same thing.

And now that I have established this truth from reason and Scripture, let us see the rich treasure it contains.

And let us first consider the proposition before us, i. e. *every act of the Divine Being*. If we consider his acts with respect to time, the proposition contains actions past, present, and future ; if with respect to place, it relates not only to this earth and its inhabitants, but comprehends those innumerable worlds that fill the immensity of space, and all the beings that ever have or ever will inhabit them. Such is the extent of our third consequence, it comprehends every act of the divine will, whether in time or in space.

But let us advance a step farther, and see what those actions are of which God is the source. And here I shall perhaps surprise certain of my readers, by asserting that God is the author of every action ; all that is done throughout the universe, if not the

immediate act of the Deity, is the immediate act of creatures, animate or inanimate, who compose the universe. Now these creatures being the work of God, absolutely depend on the power of their Creator for their existence and action, for in him they live, move, and have their being; neither could they, as our Saviour declared to Pilate, *have any power, except it were given them from above.* Thus every action of the creature is at the same time an action of the Creator. Creatures are the second causes, the Creator is the first cause of all. Second causes are instruments in the hand of the first, by which he accomplishes his eternal purposes; therefore every thing ultimately proceeds from the first cause: For, *who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commanded it not? Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good. I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things.**

* The Author's assertion in this particular appears objectionable, and not sufficiently supported. As God has given to rational creatures a distinct existence, will, and activity from his own; the abuse of these fa-

But among the actions of second causes are found a multitude of sins and crimes; and can these be referred to the action of

culties cannot be ascribed to God, but are strictly and properly the works of the creature. The declaration of Christ to Pilate is but ill calculated to support what it is here brought to prove.—Pilate on that occasion arrogantly boasts of his power or authority over the Son of God.—Jesus checks his vain boasting, by telling him, “Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: Therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin;” plainly intimating, that as he (Jesus) came from God, he was subject only to the authority of his God and Father, those therefore who delivered him up were chargeable with the great sin of usurping authority over him into whose hands all power in heaven and earth was given; and unless Pilate could produce his authority from above, he was not entitled to exercise any power over Jesus Christ. This warning given to Pilate, had the effect to make him seek the release of Jesus, although in the event his time-serving disposition got the better of his conscience.—The quotation from Isaiah, “I make peace and create evil,” evidently relates to punishment, and not to moral evil.

The following extract from the Chevalier Ramsay is submitted to the reader, as containing an able discussion of the point in hand.—It occurs in the dialogue between Cyrus and Eleazar the Jewish high priest.

the First Cause, without making God the author of sin? The difficulty arising from this objection will disappear, if we attend to

“ *Cyrus*. How could evil happen under the government of a God who is good, wise, and powerful? if wise he might have foreseen it, if powerful he might have hindered it, and if good he would have prevented it.

“ *Eleaz*. Liberty is a necessary consequence of our reasonable nature. To be free, is to be able to chuse; to chuse is to prefer: Every being capable of reasoning and comparing can prefer, and consequently chuse. It is true, in every choice we necessarily chuse what appears to us the best; but we can suspend our choice till we have examined whether the good that presents itself be a real good, or only an apparent one. The soul is not free to see or not to see the objects she looks upon; to discern or not discern their difference when she sees them; or to choose without a reason for choosing: But she is free to look or not to look; to consider objects on one side only, or on several; to choose them for a good or for a bad reason: We are never invincibly captivated by any finite good, because we may think of a greater good, and so may discover a superior charm which will carry us away from the less attractive object; and it is on this activity, natural to all rational beings, that liberty depends.—God could not give us intelligence without giving us liberty.

what has been said relative to the immediate actions of second causes, that they are at the same time the actions of the creature

“*Cyrus.* Could not God have prevented us from abusing our liberty, by shewing us truth with so clear an evidence, that it would have been impossible to mistake ?

“*Elez.* The purest light does not illuminate those who will not see—every finite intelligence may turn away his eyes from the truth.—Every created spirit is necessarily and essentially fallible.—To ask why God has made fallen intelligences, is to ask why he has made them finite, or why he has not created gods as perfect as himself ; a thing impossible.

“*Cyrus.* Could not God employ his almighty power to force free intelligences to see and relish truth ?

“*Elez.* Under the empire of God himself, despotic rule and liberty are incompatible. God does every thing he pleases in heaven and upon earth ; but he will not employ his absolute power to destroy the free nature of intelligent beings ; if he did, they would act no longer from choice but necessity ; they would obey, but they would not love. Now love is what God commands, and it is the only worship worthy of him. He does not require it for any advantage to himself, but for the good of his creatures ; he will have them happy, and contribute to their own happiness ; happy by love, and by love of pure choice : It is thus that their merit augments their felicity.

and of the Creator. Those actions in the creature which are evil, are no farther sinful than as they partake of a corrupt will, and are opposed to the law of God ; *for sin*

“ *Cyrus.* Could not the Deity have employed infallible means to secure the happiness of intelligent beings, without violating their liberty ; and to subject free agents, as well as necessary ones, to his eternal purposes ?

“ *Eleaz.* We cannot form too high an idea of the perfections of the infinitely perfect Being ; he wills the happiness of all intelligences, knows all the means requisite to accomplish his will, and sooner or later will render those means absolutely and infallibly efficacious, without violating the liberty of spirits. The permission of sin, expiatory pains, and all the fatal consequences of our rebellion, are a part of those means, and of the plan of his adorable providence. God first exerted all the efforts of his power ; he exhausted, so to speak, all the treasures of his wisdom ; he displayed all the charms of his goodness ; he neglected nothing to prevent the fall of spirits. Seeing at last that he could not keep them in the love of order without violating their liberty, he left them for a moment to the fatal consequences of their wanderings, because he knew how to make all end in the accomplishment of his decrees. He who calls being out of nothing, can draw an infinite good from a transient evil ; order from confusion ; the universal beauty of his work from a slight blemish which he suffers in it ;

is the transgression of the law. But in as much as these actions belong to the First Cause, they must proceed from a will the most excellent, and dispensations the most

and the permanent happiness of all spirits from the momentaneous pains which a small number of intelligences suffer by their own fault. All the heavenly hosts are spectators of what passes here below, and are confirmed for ever in the love of order, by seeing the terrible effects and natural consequences of our unfaithfulness. This is the reason why God suffers evil for a moment; our example is an eternal lesson to all spirits.—The earth is but an atom in comparison of immensity; the whole extent of time is but a moment in respect of eternity: These two small points will one day disappear:—Yet a little moment, and evil will be no more.

“*Cyrus.* Could not the infinite goodness of God have brought back his offending creatures to order, without making them suffer?

“*Eleaz.* Should God, after our rebellion, continue to us the full enjoyment of created pleasure, we should never aspire to an union with the Creator; we should content ourselves with an inferior happiness, without any endeavours to attain to the supreme beatitude of our nature. The only means to hinder free beings from relapsing into disorder, is to make them feel, for a time, the fatal consequences of their error. God owes it to his justice to punish the guilty, that he may not countenance crimes; and his goodness

salutary: Second actions become culpable before God by the wicked intentions which instigate their actions; while, at the same time, they are the ignorant and undesigning

likewise requires it, in order to correct and reform the criminal. Natural evil is necessary in order to cure moral evil;—suffering is the only remedy for sin. All will suffer, more or less, in proportion as they are more or less gone astray: Those who have never departed from their duty, will for ever excel the rest in knowledge and in happiness; those who delay their return to it, will be always inferior to the other in perfection and felicity.—This is the order established by eternal wisdom, the immutable law of distributive justice, from which God cannot deviate, without being essentially wanting to himself, countenancing rebellion, and exposing all finite and fallible beings to the danger of disturbing universal harmony. You see in all this the conduct of a God—of a Creator, who drew spirits out of nothing to make them happy; he punishes them, that they may return into order; he suspends the exercise of his absolute power, that by the secret springs of an immutable wisdom, goodness, and justice, he may make them accomplish freely his eternal purposes.

“ I comprehend you, said Cyrus; God could not deprive us of liberty, without depriving us of intelligence; nor hinder us from being fallible, without making us infinite; nor prevent our wandering, without destroying our liberty; nor dispense us from ex-

instruments by which the First Cause executes the purposes of his eternal counsels.

But we will have recourse to some examples to shew the justice and truth of this distinction. The death of the Son of God is allowed by all who call themselves Christians, to be the most atrocious crime, the most horrible act, that the malice and wickedness of second causes could ever invent; and yet this action, as far as it belongs to the First Cause, is the greatest of blessings, the utmost display of benignity and love. *When the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together, it was against the*

piatory pains, without violating his justice and goodness: Exempt from all passions, he has neither anger nor revenge; he chastises only to amend, he punishes only to cure, he permits sin only that he may not violate our liberty, he is tender of that liberty only that he makes us merit, he exacts that merit only to augment our happiness, he does not employ his almighty power to force us to be happy, because he will give us the eternal pleasure of contributing to our own happiness by love, and by a love of pure choice; he does good for the love of good, without having any need of our services, without gaining any thing by our virtues, or losing any thing by our crimes."—*Cyrus's Trav.* Book viii. p. 217.—222.

Lord and against his Christ ; but this opposition to the will of God, which was their sin, was in his hand the means of effecting whatsoever his counsel had determined before to be done.

We have another striking example in the history of Joseph :---inasmuch as the cruel treatment he experienced was the action of his unnatural brothers, animated by hatred and envy, it was a crime of a black and detestable nature ; but view it as it relates to the First Cause, and it will appear not only as the road to his elevation and prosperity, but as the salutary mean of preservation to a numerous and flourishing nation. This is the language of Joseph himself, who, reasoning with his brethren, says, *As for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good ;* remarkable words these, by which we are authorised to affirm, that whatever the sinner intends as evil, the Divine Ruler of events means unto good.

The parable of the prodigal son offers us a third instance in confirmation of this truth. His demand of the portion that belonged to him was the action of a libertine, desirous to shake off the restraints of paternal

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authority, and to give loose to every unruly passion ; but the grant of his request by his father, was the excellent and salutary means of producing indigence and misery, and in consequence of these afflictions, conversion and amendment. Now we should do well to consider, that in this parable our Saviour represents the Supreme Being under the image of the father.

Thus we see the Deity presiding over the universe, governing and directing every action in time and in space, so that there is not an individual among intelligent beings who is not authorised to say, All that has ever befallen me, from the first moment of my existence to the present, is the work of God ; nor can any event that may concern me hereafter, in time or eternity, ever take place, without the concurrence of the First Cause. Ah ! since it is our happiness to be in possession of so delightful, so comforting a truth, let us never more confine our views, with servile stupidity, to second causes. In all that befalls us, whether good or evil, let us elevate our thoughts to the great First Cause ; let us acquire this delightful habit, that whatever the changes of this passing

scene may be, we may be ever ready to say, with the acquiescence of true devotion, I will be dumb and open not my mouth, because thou, O Lord, doest it.

If then, every event in time and space, is the act of the First Cause, either directly or indirectly, by the medium of the creature ; we know that infinite goodness produces and overrules every event, and therefore, that whatever befalls every creature in any period of time, or in any part of that immense space which composes the universe, is, with respect to each of them, the greatest possible good. And is not this the most delightful, the most sublime, the most interesting truth that can engage the attention, or animate the hopes of a creature ! a truth as certain and necessary as the infinite goodness of God. How it brightens the face of nature, and decks the splendours of the universe in the smiles of benignity ! This delightful truth, as it relates not only to ourselves, but embraces every created intelligence, must fill all who are so happy as to possess it, with the most lively sentiments of confidence and joy. How happy am I to be assured, that every

event that has befallen me, from the first moment of my existence to the present, as well as whatever will befall me throughout all eternity, is the greatest possible good that the infinite bounty of my Creator can bestow.

Such is the assurance, such the consequence arising from the knowledge of the infinite goodness of God. How much more truly valuable than any of those things which ignorance and folly seek with ardour, and of which vanity and presumption make their boast! For thus saith the Lord, by the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah, *Let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.* May we not henceforth rejoice evermore, and in every thing give thanks. Never let us be cast down by any events, even those which wear the most discouraging aspect; never let us *judge according to appearance*, but rather by this great principle of which we are sure, that infinite goodness, enlightened by infinite wisdom, and seconded by infinite power, dispenses

every event, and say with Job, *Though he slay me yet will I trust in him.*

Let us not quit this interesting truth, till we have attended to two consequences, which are calculated to demonstrate its infinite importance.

And first, let us observe to how sublime and glorious a height this knowledge of God raises human nature, by comparing the state of a man destitute of this knowledge, with the state of him who possesses it. I mean to represent these opposite conditions in my own person, which every one may apply to himself with equal truth and propriety.

Destitute of the knowledge of God, what am I but ignorance and blindness, encompassed on every side with thick darkness? Not only incapable of foreseeing future events, unable *to boast myself of the morrow, not knowing what a day may bring forth*, but ignorant of the judgment I ought to form of events when they have actually taken place. I know not when to rejoice or when to be afflicted, because I cannot distinguish with certainty the good or the evil. I rejoice to-day, at what yesterday afflicted me;

and what now transports me with delight, may on the morrow fill me with affliction and distress. A hundred times have I been guilty of these mortifying mistakes; and were I not blessed with the knowledge of God, I should thus continue the deplorable and wretched sport of fortuitous events.

But no sooner am I instructed in the knowledge of God, no sooner do I behold the First Cause of all, as a Being possessed of infinite goodness, but darkness and chance exist no more for me, light surrounds my path, and tranquility inhabits my breast. It is true that I do not perceive, any more than before, how every event is calculated to produce the greatest good; because such knowledge can alone belong to the Being who distinctly views the immense chain of causes and effects; but I am not less persuaded that every event is the greatest possible benefit, because overruled by infinite goodness.

May I not say, that in this treasure I possess the pearl of great price; and ought I not henceforth to esteem it as my riches, my joy, my consolation, and my happiness? I will no more take thought for the mor-

row---for the morrow, did I say; no, not for the events of eternity. None of these things shall move me, but I will cast all my care upon him who careth for me, and is the dispenser of every event. And let what will befall me, I will raise my thoughts to the great First Cause, and be ready to say, O Supreme and adorable Goodness, thou didst it; it is thy choice, and can therefore be no other than my greatest good. Thus, whatever may be the present appearance of second causes, they will never be any other in my sight than instruments in the hands of infinite goodness; and I will courageously defy all the powers of nature, every creature in heaven and in earth, in time or in eternity, to be able to separate me from the divine love.

To me the glorious effects of the divine goodness are such, as entirely to overcome my own ignorance and weakness, and extend my knowledge and power far beyond their natural bounds. I know not what is necessary to my happiness, but the infinite goodness of the First Cause knows it for me. I am, it is true, incapable of procuring the means essential to my felicity, but I know

that the power of the First Cause is able to effect every thing which he sees suitable to my moral state, and conducive to my real happiness. When I consider the glorious, the delightful consequences which attend this knowledge of God, I feel the force of the eulogy contained in the ninth chapter of the prophecy of Jeremiah---*Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things do I delight, saith the Lord.*

I am now come to the second consideration resulting from the third consequence; and this is, that the scheme which divine wisdom has contrived for the government of moral agents is the plan of infinite goodness. This goodness has assigned to man his final destination, and from the creation of the world to the present moment, is continually employed in the execution of this perfect plan, which it will never neglect, never abandon, in time or in eternity, but fully ac-

comply, to the praise and glory of the divine name. And could I ever have employed to better purpose the time and talents thou hast bestowed upon me, O my God, than in attempting to develop the adorable plan of thine infinite goodness, according to the light thou hast vouchsafed me in nature and in revelation. I will not be discouraged by the sublimity of the subject, though I know I must sink infinitely below its majesty; for who can attain to the height of the divine counsels? Were I the most enlightened, the most eloquent among mortals---were I even to speak the language of angels, or could I boast the nature of these celestial messengers, I should be confounded and absorbed in the immense abyss.

Having demonstrated the truth, and unfolded the meaning of our third confession, it is time that I should apply to it all those dreadful evils which we see in the world, and the more terrible calamities which divine justice will inflict upon the wicked in a future state. What are we to think of these evils? What judgment are we to form concerning their existence? Afflicted by the light of our proposition, I af-

firm with confidence, That under the government and providence of an infinitely good Being, all is constantly right; and that there does not, nor ever will exist, any real evil in the universe.

However, when I assert that there exists no real evil, I am sensible it requires an explanation, which will be short and easy. Evil, considered in itself, is real---alas! but too real, in this unconnected view. The various and dreadful crimes which compose the black catalogue of vice, the acuteness of pain, the horrors of indigence, the anguish of dissipation, are no doubt real evils, heavy calamities; to maintain the contrary would be to the last degree absurd. But if we view each of these in their consequences and effects, we shall see that they are not real evils; because the infinite goodness of God, who can derive good from evil, knows how to make them conspire to eternal happiness, to infinite good; so that the evils through which we must inevitably pass, being the necessary means of happiness, cannot be esteemed other than real good. Do we know that we are the creatures of God, whose destination is for immortality and

happiness; and that in order to fit us for their enjoyment, he has placed us on this earth for a very little time, where our days are as an hand-breadth, and our age as nothing, before that eternity which awaits us. We know this, and nevertheless, derogating from the grandeur of our hopes, and confining our views to the present world, we consider the evils which assault us on every side as they are in themselves, without extending our views farther. Should they, by this means, appear bitter and terrible calamities---should they leave us without consolation, destitute of courage or strength to support them, how can we complain when we have given them their sting? In order to form a proper judgment of the evils of life, let us consider them as connected with their effects, and we shall agree to the proposition already laid down, as to a certain truth, That under the government and providence of a Being infinitely good, every thing will be ultimately right; and that there neither is, nor ever can be, any real evil in the universe. But let us analyze this truth, by applying it to moral and physical evil; the former of which comprehends

every species of sin, and the latter every kind of suffering:

Let us begin by an enquiry into moral evil. Moral evil, or sin, considered in its own nature, is a great and terrible evil, because absolutely opposed to our happiness. Sin is, in its nature, that will of the creature which is contrary to the will of his Creator. Now, every act of the divine will being an act of infinite goodness, designed to conduct us to happiness, every will in man which is opposed to the will of God, must necessarily conduct to evil and misery; nor can the omnipotence of God himself render a creature happy, till this perverse and evil will is subdued. Such is the odious and horrible nature of sin, it places man in a state contrary to his nature, in as much as the desire of happiness is, as it were, a natural instinct, and the attainment of misery the inevitable consequence of sin. This seducer of our souls leads us to reject the felicity offered us by our Creator; and to seek it where it is impossible ever to be found. And is not this a war, a cruel war to our souls? Nay more; sin, as long as he maintains his dominion, is an implacable

enemy, increasing and continually aggravating the evil he does; fortifying our inordinate desires, and rendering their tyranny more and more imperious by the force of habit. He inures us to his yoke, till he makes us drink iniquity like water. Ah! might I ever hope that my expostulations would reach any of those unhappy votaries whom he leads captive at his will, I should tell them, from the love I bear to their immortal souls, that the accusations I have brought against sin are not ended here, but that there yet remains a fatal truth to be told them, the inevitable consequence of their subjection to this monster; a truth which I consider as the most solemn, the most alarming that can ever strike the understanding of an intelligent being---and this is, the fatal tendency of sin to stifle in us all taste for virtue, and to lead us on to such a state of depravity and wickedness, that to do good is hateful to us; and when once we are arrived at this terrible degree of corruption, the conquest of sin over us is secure, for we are incapable of discerning the things that belong to our peace; they are foolishness unto us, neither can we know

them. And lastly, to complete the evil, sin deprives us of the only resource that could yet remain to extricate us from the gulph of misery in which we are plunged, by creating in us an aversion to truth. Truth, did we not fly from it, might discover to us our miserable condition, fill us with a lively and salutary horror, with a sincere and ardent desire of escaping it, and, by its celestial ray, transform us by the renewing of our minds, till it had caused us to experience that the will of God, which by our sins we had dared to oppose, was indeed a good, an acceptable, and a perfect will. But sin, by the hatred which it inspires for truth, detains us in chains of darkness, and closes every avenue by which the light could find access to our hearts. It causes us to neglect and despise the means of instruction with which we are encompassed, and creates in us the most unmountable obduracy of heart. Such is the dreadful nature of sin considered in itself.

If such then is its nature, may I not expect to be asked, Why is it not an evil, an evil greater than can be expressed; and how can I maintain, that under the con-

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duct of God all is right, and that there exists no real evil in the universe: How then shall not sin be called a real evil? Is not that an evil which causes us to reject supreme happiness; which corrupts us till we become monsters of depravity and wickedness; which makes us so totally blind to our true interest, that we prefer darkness to light, and thus leads us to the most hardened obduracy? Ah! take heed, will such say, lest in treating this difficult and thorny question, you draw down on your own head the woe denounced upon those who call evil good.

In answer to this objection, I agree that sin, considered in its own nature, is a greater evil than can ever be expressed. I acknowledge that it is impossible to exaggerate its turpitude; nor have I, in enumerating its malignant effects, in the least palliated its unhappy tendency to produce the greatest pain and distress to whoever is infected with it. But nevertheless, a confidence arising from the most perfect certainty enables me to repeat, that sin, considered in its consequences and effects, is not a

real evil ; and I hope not to quit this subject till I have made this clearly appear.

If sin, or moral evil, was to reign for ever in the heart of man, I should be the last to affirm that it was not a real evil. On the contrary, I should never have engaged in my present design, nor have attempted to unfold a scheme, of which the bare idea would make me tremble : For, if we grant the eternal duration of sin, we must determine it to be an infinite evil, whether considered in its nature, or in its effects. Upon this supposition, what is its nature but the eternal revolt of sinners against God, and their eternal progress in wickedness ? Considered in its consequences and effects, it would be the eternal source of the greatest misery. Let us not dwell on a supposition equally opposed to the nature of a Being perfectly good, and to that of creatures made after his image ; but consider moral evil in its true light ; view it as finite in duration ; as an enemy, which will sooner or later be vanquished in every heart. When the Supreme Being created man for happiness, he certainly knew how far sin would prove the obstacle of this felicity :

He knew that our whole race would become its slaves, in a greater or less degree, and incapable of extricating themselves from its unhappy influence: but the things which are impossible with men, are possible with God; and therefore a Being perfectly good, knew by what means he could accomplish the destruction of sin in every heart. This is the object of all the divine dispensations, in nature and revelation; the great end which the wisdom of God proposes in his providential government; this was the work which the Redeemer of the world was sent to accomplish, when he came to save us from our sins.

The means by which this change is to be effected, will no doubt be painful, though absolutely necessary, and finally efficacious; for moral evil must be subdued by physical evil, by the miseries and sufferings inflicted on the sinner here, and by the far more terrible and more durable agonies of an unhappy hereafter; so that physical evil can never be terminated till it has accomplished the entire extinction of moral evil. This I have proved already, in treating of the infinite justice of the Supreme Being,

where I considered all suffering, present and future, as chastisements inflicted *for our profit, that we might be made partakers of the divine holiness*. When these shall have produced their effect, and the enemy of happiness is subdued in every heart; when infinite goodness shall have thus made mankind wise and virtuous, and reduced their wills to a perfect conformity to his; then, and not till then, will the current of his mercy flow in an uninterrupted course; then will the Creator and Redeemer of mankind open to them the inexhaustible treasures of felicity and glory; then will every difficulty disappear, and the adorable goodness of the Lord shine in full splendour, every heart will exult with joy and gratitude, and every tongue will be tuned to praise, thankful for those very sufferings *which have worked a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. This is the period, the glorious and certain period, to which we must direct our thoughts, if we would form just ideas of the nature of evil, which however great, is not absolute, since it leads to real and infinite good.

I know of but one cloud that may shade

the lustre of this truth to some of my readers ; but, as to them it may appear impenetrable, I must state the difficulty, and endeavour to obviate it. It is this : If we allow the Creator to be as infinitely powerful as he is perfectly good ; why did not he make all his creatures wise and good, virtuous and holy, from the commencement of their existence ? Why did he not appoint their perfection and felicity to be coeval with their being, and exclude every kind of evil, by forming them in that state of perfection which their natures are capable of attaining ?

I admit that this ideal system is pleasing to the imagination ; that it represents a world far different from that which we inhabit ; a world where sin and disorder, suffering and affliction, would find no entrance ; and where the torments prefigured under the *wrath to come*, would never alarm, because those also would be absolutely useless.

But this, alas ! is only a dream, delightful if you will, but existing only in our imagination, and absolutely contradicted by facts. Moral and physical evil actually do

exist ; and frail mortals are sinful and unhappy. Such is the fact. This earth, peopled by a succession of beings in the infancy of their existence, is peopled also by ignorant and sinful mortals ; it is filled with their disorders and miseries, with their crimes and sufferings ; such is the fact : Evil exists, and yet it appears to us, that it were far better it had never been. How are we then to escape from such a labyrinth ?

Before we enter on the solution of this difficulty, let us reflect for a moment who, and what we are, who thus arraign the works of the Almighty. Alas ! are we not weak, ignorant, short-sighted mortals---creatures of yesterday, inhabiting a small speck in the immense universe ? Let us therefore take heed when we ask of God, Why he has made us thus ? lest the question should proceed from a criticising and rebellious spirit. But should it, on the contrary, arise from a desire of information, and a thirst after truth, it will not then be reprehensible, or offensive to the Fountain of all Truth ; *for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to come to the knowledge of the truth.* With these laudible

sentiments, let us therefore enquire, Why the Divine Being did not create us at first as perfect and as holy as we shall be, when we are arrived at the mansions of bliss.

I might, in the first place, answer, that were we perfectly acquainted with human nature, we should perhaps discern that holiness, from influx, is an impossible and chimerical idea ; because, perfect holiness, being the moral perfection of our wills, necessarily supposes the perfection of our understanding, and consequently the development of our faculties, and the accumulation of light and knowledge acquired by their exercise : That while we are thus acquiring knowledge by experience, the freedom of our wills, which constitute us accountable beings, will leave us liable to wander from the right way ; and that during such deviations, we may become corrupted and depraved by the force of habit. In a word, had we a perfect knowledge of human nature, it is probable we should perceive, that though man is, by his nature, capable of attaining to a holiness comparatively perfect, it must become his own by the exercise of his faculties, which renders him

liable to moral evil ; and to physical evil, which is its necessary remedy.

But though we possess presumptive evidence of all this, yet I decline grounding my answer upon probability ; I have therefore only glanced at these reflections, to shew, that to be able to form a right judgment, and ascertain the possibility or impossibility of the question before us, we ought to be endowed with a perfect knowledge of human nature. Let these reflections produce in our hearts sentiments of diffidence and respect, when we speak of him whose ways are in the deep ; the Father of light, before whom we are darkness.

But let us quit the path of doubt and uncertainty, and give a decisive answer to the question, Why the Divine Being did not create us at first as perfect and as holy as we shall be, when we arrive at the mansions of bliss ?

The fact then is, as the question supposes, that the Creator has not acted thus ; that in forming this world he has not excluded moral and physical evil. This is sufficient for me ; it is all I require, to be perfectly assured that this exclusion was impossible ; or,

in other words, that moral and phyfical evil were the natural confequences of that freedom of will neceffary to beings in a ftate of probation and improvement. We may therefore fay, that the total exclufion of evil was not an object for the Divine Omnipotence to exercife itfelf upon ; becaufe God cannot contradict himfelf. Every act of God is an act of infinite goodnefs : It was perfect goodnefs created the world, and permitted the entrance of all the evils we deplore. Now, divine goodnefs can only be called infinite or perfect, becaufe it makes the beft choice, and produces the greateft good. We may therefore be affured that this world, formed as it is, is beft adapted to the end, an end moft perfect and excellent ; and that it was not poffible to create us in the beginning as holy and perfect as we fhall be hereafter. Had it been poffible, or, which is the fame thing with God, had it been fit and right, infinite wifdom and goodnefs would not have acted otherwife.

We may now admit as a truth what we have juft advanced on the footing of probability, that holinefs from influx is impof-

sible, because destructive of moral agency, which both supposes and requires a state of schooling, preparative to one of perfection and felicity.

Let us therefore acknowledge that these finite evils are not real evils ; because, by their means, mankind are raised to supreme and universal happiness ; and therefore, that under the government and providence of a Being infinitely good, every thing will be ultimately right ; and that there neither is, nor ever can exist, any real evil in the universe.

In applying this our third consequence to the various evils we see in the world, I have given the only satisfactory answer to the celebrated question respecting the origin of evil, which has always been considered as difficult and embarrassing, and exercised, at different times, the greatest geniuses, both ancient and modern. In all I have ever read on this subject, I have seen the infinite duration of evil granted, whence it became impossible to solve the difficulty ; for who can reconcile infinite evil with infinite goodness, infinite cruelty with infinite love ? But though these contradictions cannot be con-

ciliated, we shall find no difficulty in conceiving the admission of finite evil, when it is a mean by which creatures may be raised to the perfection of which their natures are susceptible, and made fit for the enjoyment of complete happiness. This is the only kind of evil which a Being perfectly good can ever admit into his plan, and the only satisfactory method of accounting for its existence.

Various, no doubt, have been the answers to this thorny question ; and one of the most plausible, in order to justify the goodness of God in inflicting never-ending torments on the reprobate, is by supposing those eternal sufferings necessary to procure the eternal happiness not only of the elect, but as one world is connected with another in the immense system, of a multitude of other creatures. This solution has been received with avidity by numbers who sincerely sought the truth, but whose minds were prepossessed by the supposition of the endless duration of torments, so as never to entertain a doubt on the subject. A belief so opposed to the divine goodness, throws the mind into a restless and uneasy state, from whence

it eagerly desires an escape, and hopes to have effected in the above solution, which makes the infinite misery of some conducive to the infinite happiness of others. They would not certainly be deceived by such an argument, did they not rejoice to find some valuable end answered by the sufferings of the reprobate, and in this idea of felicity imagine they see the traces of the infinite goodness of their Creator. If they cannot entirely divest themselves of the feelings of pity and compassion for the many victims thus devoted to eternal misery, they endeavour to lessen the uneasy sensation, by reflecting that such have brought it on themselves, by an obstinate resistance of the grace of God. Besides, it may be urged, is not the felicity and glory of an innumerable multitude of intelligences, resulting from this evil, an ample compensation for the eternal perdition of these wilful sinners? And with this wretched solution do men content themselves.

To neglect nothing on a subject of such importance, I must briefly examine this pretended solution, and the strange method of felicity it presents, in making the infinite

misery of some a necessary mean of happiness to others. Among a multitude of objections I could find to this horrible method of procuring felicity, which presents on all sides the most evident contradictions, I shall confine myself to proving, that this method of proceeding would be, with respect to the reprobate, unjust and cruel; and with respect to the blessed, subversive of its end.

To render a multitude of intelligent beings eternally happy, is an object so sublime and excellent, that we may esteem it worthy of the most exalted ideas we can form of infinite wisdom and goodness; provided, however, that the means necessary to their perfection and felicity are the gift of God, in consequence of their having improved the faculties with which he has endowed them, and the means of grace and salvation he has offered them by his gospel. But to render creatures happy, were their numbers ever so great, by the infliction of eternal misery on the reprobate, would be a method most unjust and cruel. Let us not assert, by way of justification, that the reprobate have deserved the unremitting torments they endure; for if, as some say, the fault is their

own, I ask, whether existence was their fault also? Was it not the Lord that made them, and not they themselves? Is it not true, that they were not culpable prior to their existence, and could not then deserve any suffering? And can we deny, that the Divine Mind was perfectly acquainted with the use they would make of existence, that it would never be other than a state of suffering and misery? Is it not true, that existence bestowed on such terms is to the creature an infinite evil; and that the irresistible fiat which brought them into being was the greatest evil that could possibly befall them, and this at a time when they could have no demerit, but were perfectly innocent? I leave every candid mind to determine, how an irresistible act, which produces infinite evil to innocent beings, is to be qualified, if it is not an act sovereignly unjust and barbarous? We may therefore infer with certainty, that a Being perfectly good will never adopt such a method into his plan.

Let us now consider this pretended means of felicity to the blessed, and shew, that as far as it concerns their happiness, it is a mean destructive of its end.

It is not an easy thing to conceive how the infinite misery of the reprobate can be a mean, and a necessary mean of happiness to the blessed. Can we suppose that intelligent creatures, capable by their nature of perfection and felicity, would be unable to attain to this glorious destination, unless at the same time a number of intelligent beings existed in eternal misery? Among creatures of the same nature, thence capable of the same happiness, must a part be made happy at the expence of a considerable portion devoted to endless misery and despair? Cannot a Being infinitely perfect and happy communicate beatitude to his intelligent offspring on other and more favourable terms? Can he not be to some the inexhaustible source of happiness, unless he is to others the never-failing source of misery? But let us cease to heap contradiction on contradiction, horror on horror, and end this disagreeable discussion, by shewing that the eternal misery of the reprobate, instead of being a necessary mean of happiness to the blessed, would, on the contrary, poison and destroy their felicity, and prove subversive of its end.

In the *first* place, it would poison the felicity of the blessed. The inhabitants of heaven could not be happy, unless penetrated with the most ardent charity for their fellow creatures; for St Paul tells us, that without charity we are nothing. In this respect therefore, as well as in many others, the blessed will resemble the angels of God in heaven---those kind compassionate spirits, who interest themselves in the conversion and salvation of sinful mortals, insomuch that there is joy among them over one sinner that repenteth. It would therefore be impossible that the righteous in glory, fired with celestial charity, should taste the joys of Paradise, while they knew that a great number of fellow beings were the prey of never-ending torments. They must necessarily and ardently wish for the deliverance and salvation of these unhappy beings, and at the same time be convinced that this ardent and eternal desire of their hearts would never be satisfied; so that their charity would be the source of their misery, a never-dying worm in their breast, which would render them unhappy in the mansions of bliss. O Divine Charity, thou greatest, most

sublime, most godlike of virtues ; thou who art the glory and excellence of intelligent creatures, and alone can make them partakers of the divine nature, art thou destined to become the torment of the just in heaven !

But how much more painful still would it be for the righteous to know, that these eternal sufferings, destitute of any valuable purpose to the culpable individual, were necessary means of procuring their happiness ? Would not every possibility of enjoyment vanish at the idea of possessing it at the expence of these deplorable victims of distress ? The best characters here below are, alas ! very far from having acquired that seraphic charity which will animate the spirits of the blessed ; for, in our best estate while here, we are evil, as our Saviour declares in the seventh chapter of Matthew ; and yet with the feeble spark of charity I possess, and I doubt not but every one of my readers can join in the sentiment, I had rather never have existed, than be assured that the eternal happiness designed for me was the result of the eternal sufferings, not of a multitude, but of an individual creature. Ex-

istence is not necessary, but if once I exist I must desire happiness. And what felicity, O God, must that be which is founded upon, or even increased by the misery of others! Do we not perceive such a mean destructive of its end?

I add, in the *second* place, that it would entirely destroy the happiness of the righteous. Charity consists in constantly placing ourselves in the situation of others; upon this principle, what must the feelings of the just be? surely of a nature quite opposed to happiness. What would they discover in their Maker? Not infinite, disinterested, adorable goodness, but a partial and imperfect favour, consequently a doubtful and uncertain benevolence, if that title is any way applicable to a disposition compatible with injustice and cruelty. What a deplorable change does this supposition make in the happiness of heaven! sin might indeed be for ever excluded, but sorrow would find an entrance; and that perfect admiration, that entire confidence, that celestial love for the greatest and best of Beings, which must unite the souls of the just to their sovereign good, would be poisoned

in its source ; no fulness of joy must reside in his presence, and at his right hand no pleasures for evermore. Pardon, O my God, thou most perfectly good and merciful Being, who art the substance of all that excellence of which we frail and sinful beings can discern but the shadow ; forgive, I beseech thee, if but for a moment I am led to speak of thee, not as thou art, and as thou ever wilt shew thyself to all thy creatures, but such as the prejudices and passions of men would make thee appear.

Thus we see, that the eternal misery of the wicked cannot contribute to the felicity of the righteous ; it would be both unjust and cruel, and even destructive of its end, consequently can never be adopted into the plan of a perfectly good and wise Being.

Thus am I come to the conclusion of my third consequence from the infinite goodness of God, That all his acts are acts of goodness. I have established its truth, I have demonstrated its extent, and have shewn that the Supreme Governor of the universe presides over and directs every event to ultimate good ; therefore, that whatever may befall his creatures, in time or in eternity,

proceeds from infinite goodness in the First Cause, and is to each of them the greatest possible good. I have applied this to present and future evil, and have demonstrated, that under the government and providence of an all-perfect Being, every thing is ultimately right, and that in his universe no real evil can exist; which has led me to examine the celebrated question of the origin of moral evil, to which I hope I have given a satisfactory reply.

By the aid of this solution we may affirm, that all the evils the Divine Being dispenses to his creatures, whether here or hereafter, proceed from his infinite goodness; or, in other words, that it is impossible he should ever dispense any evil in this world, or in the world to come, which is not, even to the individuals, an actual exercise of perfect goodness.

SECT. II.

PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE DIVINE GOODNESS.

THE practical or moral consequences arising from the infinite goodness of God, are the

various sentiments naturally produced in the heart by the knowledge of this supreme goodness, where the understanding is thoroughly convinced of its truth. And though this enumeration is in some measure foreign to a work particularly dedicated to the theory of religion, I nevertheless proposed admitting them into my plan, from a conviction of their extreme importance, and their tendency to render us wise, good, perfect, and happy.

These important and valuable effects are reducible to three heads--as they relate to the Divine Being, to ourselves, and to our fellow creatures; such as, the love of God, internal joy, and charity to our neighbour. I shall therefore observe, by way of fourth consequence, That the infinite goodness of God is the only solid foundation of prevailing and continual joy.

I know that he who made me is a Being perfectly good, a Father whose love is infinite, and who, by an effect of that love, gave me existence that I might obtain happiness; to proclaim and accomplish which, he has sent his Son from heaven, and delivered him up to sufferings and death; and

with this precious gift, does he not give me all things? His laws, his dispensations, his blessings, his chastisements---in a word, every event that befalls me tends to promote this great end, and to assure me, that this perfectly good Being will confer upon me to all eternity all possible good. What perfect joy may now take possession of my heart! I may rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory! I may prize the precious gift of life, since I exist by the good pleasure of my faithful Creator, and for a blessed eternity, during which I shall never cease to be the happy object of his care and love. And is not this a subject for prevailing and continual joy?

It is the subject of *prevailing joy*, as it fills and occupies my whole heart---sorrow and affliction, under what form soever they may assault me, must fly before it; for what are they when compared with so sincere, so permanent a joy? The contemplation of the Being perfectly good, shall put a gladness into my heart, a balm of consolation and support, which all the evils of time shall in vain attempt to destroy; for in these evils I behold the chastening of parental

kindness improving my moral nature, and consider them therefore as real benefits, since by their means I shall one day arrive at perfection and happiness. The farther effects of this prevailing joy, are perfect contentment in every situation and condition in life, patience under affliction, and a degree of courage and strength which makes me rise superior to every trial, and more than conqueror through him that has loved me.

I have also said, in the second place, that the knowledge of the infinite extent of divine goodness, gives rise to *continual joy*. If I never lose sight of a Being constantly employed in promoting my happiness; if I call to mind his benefits when sitting in my house and when walking by the way, when I lie down and when I rise up, can sorrow ever penetrate my heart, or affliction dispel the transporting delight arising from an assurance of the paternal love of my Creator? If I set the Lord always before me, if I thus habituate my mind to his presence, which is fulness of joy, if his adorable goodness is the first object that employs my waking thoughts; may I not hope, from such contemplation, that serenity and peace, con-

tentment and joy, will accompany me thro' the day? O Lord, satisfy me early with thy mercy, that I may rejoice and be glad all my days.

Such is the prevailing, the constant joy produced by the knowledge of the infinite goodness of God, which can never abandon us in life or in death; the source of present as well as of future happiness, and the only permanent foundation on which to build our hope. Eternity without this affords a dreary and uncertain prospect, more calculated to raise anxiety and apprehension, than to excite satisfaction and joy. To escape from those horrors which await so many of my fellow beings, would afford me little joy; for with a nature more charitable and perfect than what I now possess, what terror and amazement must the infinite sufferings of the wicked excite in my compassionate and benevolent mind! What an influence has this idea on my best expectations! how it damps the joys of immortality!

But for ever let me adore and bless the Father of mercies, who has given me such unquestionable evidence of his almighty goodness, by which I know that the immor-

talities for which he has caused me to exist, is a truly precious and valuable gift of his infinite love, and that he is able to do for me, exceeding and abundantly above all that I can ask or think.

Is there not then, let me ask, sufficient reason for joy in the infinite goodness of God? To you, whose happiness it is to possess this knowledge I particularly address myself. You I exhort *to rejoice in hope, to be patient in tribulation, to continue instant in prayer; to rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say to rejoice;* for you possess, in the infinite goodness of God, the only solid foundation of prevailing and continual joy.

Our fifth consequence is designed to shew, That the infinite goodness of God is the only foundation of our supreme love to him.

Love to God is one of the most positive precepts in the gospel; it is distinguished as the *first and great command*, and insisted upon in terms the most energetic, as a supreme affection that must fill every capacity of the soul---*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy thought, and with all thy strength.*

To form a right judgment of this great command, I must begin by distinguishing the precepts of Scripture, as they relate either to the injunction of external actions, or to the sentiments of the heart. The observance of the former depends upon my will: For however great my repugnance to an external action may be, nevertheless it is in my power to obey. But it is not thus with relation to those precepts which are designed for the government of my internal sentiments; these are not equally at my disposal, nor do they depend on my will; I cannot therefore, from obedience to any command, be joyful when I am sad, or afflicted when I have cause to rejoice; I cannot love what I hate, or hate what I love; and thence arises that proverbial expression, that *our sentiments are not at our command*.

But if the sentiments of our hearts are not to be controuled by our wills, whence is it, let me ask, that the divine word abounds with precepts for their regulation; not only relative to our love to God, but to our self-denial, our detachment from the world, our humility, patience, charity; our love of our enemies, and forgiveness of in-

juries ; are not these sentiments of the heart, and do not the divine laws extend to them?

The discussion of this question will lead me to a short digression on the divine laws, which, as it is not foreign to my principal subject, will, I trust, be no ways unacceptable to my readers.

Human laws cannot penetrate beyond external actions ; but the laws of God must go farther, and regulate the sentiments of the heart ; so that we may affirm, that the divine commands are directed to our internal actions, since the sentiments which lead us to obedience, can alone give it any value in the sight of God. Scripture commands us to give alms, but tells us also, that though we bestow all our goods to feed the poor, and give our bodies to be burned, and have not charity, it will profit us nothing : Accordingly our Lord has declared, that *a good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things ; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things : For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, and all those crimes which spread terror and desolation over the earth.*

Such are the divine laws ; and their design to regulate our hearts, clearly points out the grandeur of the destination to which we are called. Our Supreme Lawgiver requires us to resemble him in perfection and felicity ; this is the glorious rank to which he will elevate us, but which he knows we cannot attain, till our hearts are replete with pious and charitable sentiments : It is therefore that the Lord looketh on the heart, and by his precepts directs and governs our inmost sentiments.

To try the heart and reins is a truly divine prerogative, which can only belong to the Being who formed us. He knows how to purify our hearts by enlightening our understandings. He gives us in his word both instructions and promises, that by the obedience of faith our hearts may be sanctified, enjoining us at the same time the cultivation of such sentiments as the light he has given us is calculated to produce. Thus, for instance, when he sets life and immortality before us, he bids us *rejoice evermore*. Again, he displays himself to us under most affecting characters of love and goodness, and then commands us to *love him with all*

our hearts. Ah! let us then be persuaded, when we feel not the dispositions and sentiments which the Divine Being hath made both our duty and our interest, let us be assured that the fault is our own; that we have neglected to nourish our souls with the bread of life; that we have not sufficiently attended to the sublime truths, to the magnificent objects his word sets before us; and which, were they frequently presented to our minds, could not fail of raising them far above the world, producing in us the most delightful sentiments of peace, joy, and of love.

It does not certainly depend upon ourselves to adopt these sentiments by an instantaneous act of the will, in the manner we perform any external act of obedience; and in this sense alone it is true, that our sentiments are not under our command. But it is in our power to acquire the dispositions God requires of us, to excite them in our hearts, and to cherish and strengthen them more, by reading and meditating on his word with assiduous and constant attention. Let us daily have recourse to the divine instruction contained in the gospel,

where the Son of God himself points out the things which belong to our peace. This sacred volume is, to sincere Christians, the bread of God which came down from heaven to give life to the soul; a new and spiritual life---an eternal life abiding in us. It presents to our contemplation two interesting objects, GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER, AND A CELESTIAL IMMORTALITY. And if it is certain that our minds are formed for *knowledge*, and our souls for *love*, how are these sacred pages, which contain the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord, adapted to these ends; *according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness.*

Mankind, when they disregard the word of God, do not surely attend to the extreme folly and criminality of their neglect. Has the Being of beings condescended to send his Son upon earth to enlighten our darkness, to instruct us in his will, to publish life and immortality, and shew us the road to happiness; has this precious and wonderful light been transmitted to us in his gospel; has he destined us *to be born again of incorruptible seed by his word which liveth*

and abideth for ever ; and shall we suffer our lives to wear away without making any use of it ; and while every other book is familiar to us, remain strangers to this sacred volume, and immersed in worldly concerns, as though our residence here were to last for ever ? How may professing Christians are guilty of this shameful, this foolish neglect ! Were it possible that we could desire to be our own enemies, could we take a surer method of success, than with wanton levity to disregard those powerful succours of grace under which we live ? Nay more, were it possible for us to desire to set the Almighty at defiance, could we pursue a more efficacious method than in thus abusing, perhaps throughout the course of our lives, the precious gifts he has vouchsafed us, neglecting and despising his offered assistance ; and treating alike with the disdain of contemptuous forgetfulness, his commands, his promises, and his threatenings ? But *God is not mocked*, nor can we elude the execution of his immutable designs. If we refuse to be enlightened by his word, he will have recourse to the severities of his wrath to overcome our obstinate resistance ; for thus saith the

Lord, by the mouth of his prophet Isaiah, *The word that goeth forth out of my mouth shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I send it.* How heavy will be the accusation of such hereafter, who have been guilty of this contemptuous and criminal neglect of the divine word!

I rejoice that the digression on which I entered, furnished me with an opportunity of exhorting my fellow Christians to avoid this common, this alarming and fatal evil.

Let us return to our subject. Since the Being who made us commands us to love him with all the powers he has given us, his nature must be such as naturally to produce this supreme love; St John founds it upon his goodness, when he says, *we love him because he first loved us.* That infinite goodness is, therefore, the only solid foundation of supreme love, I shall now proceed to explain.

In this perfect goodness I discover three reasons productive of my entire love. The first consists in the benefits I have hitherto experienced, which excite my grateful love:

The second arises from the promised blessings of eternity, which produce a love founded on interest: The third results from that infinite goodness which resides in the Deity, and which constitutes him the object of my utmost admiration, and most perfect filial attachment.

The *first* reason on which I found my love for the Supreme Being, is that of *gratitude for benefits received*. What are these benefits? Alas! when they are more in number than the sands on the sea-shore, how can I attempt to enumerate them! Ten thousand have escaped my recollection from my weakness; and alas! ten thousand times ten thousand from my stupidity or inattention. But this I know, that from the first moment of my existence to the present, the goodness of God has not ceased to accompany me, and to bestow upon me every suitable benefit. Let me seek to place them under different classes, that thus I may taste that the Lord is good; or, in other words, that I may love him for the multitude of his mercies.

Creation is the first of his benefits. Self-existent, necessary, and infinite in every

perfection, the Divine Being could have no need of me, nor would his power have produced me, had he not designed to manifest his love towards me. The life I have received comprehends the wonderful and admirable structure of my body, and its various organs or inlets to the mind. Also, the living soul, with all its admirable faculties, whose excellence as far exceeds that of the body, as life is superior to death, the inhabitant to the habitation; it comprehends the senses I possess, by which I am enabled to behold and to enjoy the works of nature, ---imagination, which enlarges the boundaries of those senses, and extends my existence to various periods and different parts of the world ---memory, by whose assistance I call back a numerous train of objects, and which is the receptacle of my acquired ideas---reflection and understanding, to combine and perfect those ideas; lastly, reason, or intelligence, by which I am enabled to discover truth, increase my store of knowledge, and elevate my mind to the sublime contemplation of my Creator: it comprehends that sensibility of heart, to which some have given the appellation of Moral

Sense, which naturally inclines the mind to love and pursue good, as far as it can trace it; and above all, to love God as its supreme good. By all these faculties, which are the gift of God, he has made me susceptible of pleasure and joy, and capable of an ever-increasing felicity. To sum up all in a word, he has made me *after his own image*, my intellectual nature conformable to his, by a capacity of becoming a *partaker in the divine nature*, by holiness, perfection, and happiness. What excellence, what dignity then has he bestowed upon me! for, as St Paul says, am I not also *his offspring*? is he not my Father---am I not his child? and does not this creative act of his will give me the most solemn and sacred pledge of his immutable love and goodness? for he is a faithful Creator, who will not abandon the work of his hands.

How various, how extensive then, are the benefits resulting from creation! Existence---a body fearfully and wonderfully made---an intellectual soul, capable of knowing, loving, and resembling its Maker; and a pledge and assurance that infinite goodness will never forsake his creatures. *Bless the*

Lord then, O my soul, and let all that is within me bless his holy name!

After enumerating the blessings of creation, I may rank under the second class those of *providence*. And what is providence? With relation to me, it is the continual care with which divine goodness has watched over my body and soul.

Have I ever been forgotten or neglected for a single instant, amidst the immensity of the works of God? Has not his wisdom, in every varying circumstance, constantly provided and dispensed that which was fittest and best for me?

My body, which at first was an imperceptible atom, must have perished in its germ, had not Divine Providence perfected and sustained it. Those who are most conversant with the human frame, most acquainted with its developments and revolutions, know the amazing care, the wonderful wisdom requisite to bring it to perfection. *I will praise thee, O Lord, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee when I was made in secret, and curiously*

*wrought in the lowest parts of the earth ;
 thine eyes did see my substance, yet being im-
 perfect ; and in thy book all my members were
 written, when as yet there were none of them.
 How precious also are thy thoughts unto me,
 O God, how great is the sum of them ! if I
 would count them, they are more in number
 than the sand.*

Since I have arrived at a state of maturity, how many are the blessings I have enjoyed ! Has not the earth brought forth her increase, and been constantly covered with an astonishing profusion and variety of blessings ? How manifold are those arising from the arts and sciences, and from the industry of men ; and amidst the general comforts of social life, how many private blessings have I experienced in my particular calling !

But I have also said, that the providence of God constantly watches over and supplies the wants of my soul. When my eyes first opened upon the light, I possessed a lively soul, but that soul was in its lowest state ; it contained the essence of all its future faculties, but torpid, inactive, destitute of a single idea, of any knowledge whatever, scarce sen-

tible of existence; how deplorable would have been its condition, had it not been upheld by the hand that made it! When I compare my present state with the first dawn of reason, I behold, in the progress and improvement of my faculties, a subject of gratitude and praise; for however slow, however imperceptible have been my advances, yet in every step I have made towards perfection, I have experienced the blessing of providence in affording helps and means to those superior faculties which are destined hereafter to become the sources of my perfection and felicity. Destitute of such means and assistance, my soul must have remained in a state little better than that of the brutes. It is therefore to the goodness of God, and to his watchful providence, that I owe all these mercies.

But this is not all; greater benefits remain yet to be told; for while my animal powers were acquiring strength and maturity, and my intellectual and rational faculties improving, sin, that destroyer of my perfection and happiness, has manifested itself. The lively impressions made by external objects on my senses and imagination, have ex-

cited in my soul a perverse will, together with violent and unruly passions, which soon becoming habitual, would have totally corrupted my soul with vices alike odious and fatal, had not the paternal care of divine providence attached to sin a restraint, calculated to suppress its depredations.

And what is this salutary restraint, capable of stopping the ravages of sin? It is death, which has passed upon all men, for that all have sinned; it is also all the numerous evils attendant upon a state of mortality, by which infinite wisdom checks the progress of sin, and provides its necessary remedy. Physical evil, or sufferings, he has attached to sin, and made its wages death, to stem the torrent of moral evil. Had my soul been united to an immortal body, and this world my lasting residence, I had been lost. My passions would have become ungovernable, and reduced me to the horrible slavery of vice. But the wisdom of my Creator has prevented this evil, by connecting sorrow and death with this infant state of being, and thereby made it a state of education. Placed as I am here, a stranger and a pilgrim---uncertain of sojourning another

day, every object is transitory to me, and all is vanity. Is not this calculated to repel the force of my passions, and to excite my desires after permanent life and a solid good? But lest this should be insufficient, the evils I experience from without and from within, damp the ardour of my passions, suspend their career, give me time for recollection, that reason and reflection may find entrance into my mind, and incline me to *seek the Lord, if haply I might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.*

But though the means of which I have been speaking are absolutely necessary to remedy the evil of sin, they are nevertheless insufficient for our salvation. God has therefore in his mercy given to us the assistance of his written word, made his laws the rule of our conduct, and his redemption by Jesus Christ the foundation of our hope. This revelation, absolutely necessary to the human race, will no doubt one day become universal: In the mean time, since by the grace of God we are blessed with its light, let us make a proper improvement of our privilege, and not waste our time in enquir-

ing, why so great a portion of mankind are deprived of its advantages, certain as we may be, that their merciful Creator loves them as their eternal Father, and that he will enlighten and save them, in the time and manner which his wisdom sees most proper. I shall therefore continue to recapitulate the blessings of providence towards me, which every Christian reader may apply to himself upon the same foundation.

To the blessings I have received in the ordinary course of providence, I must add those of a superior order, which I owe to that wonderful economy of grace under which it has been my happiness to be born. Hitherto I have confined my views to the natural benefits of creation and providence, I will now consider such as are superadded to nature.

I shall rank, under a third class, the blessing of *redemption*. Redemption is the gift which God has bestowed upon me in his Son, in order to my salvation. And here two sublime objects offer themselves to my consideration---the *salvation* to which I am called, and the *gift of the only begotten Son of God* ; who has brought the *glad tidings of*

peace, and is become the *captain of our salvation*, to lead us all to happiness.

I refer my reader, for a full discussion of this subject, to the preceding chapter, where it has been treated, in order to draw two proofs concerning the infinite goodness of God. I shall therefore confine myself to some detached observations on the unspeakable benefit of redemption.

In the first place, it was a gift prepared for me many ages before it took place, and preceded my birth more than seventeen centuries. May I not say, that Divine Goodness loved me prior to my existence, since long before it took place, he gave his Son for me, and thereby executed the eternal purpose, which he proposed in Christ Jesus our Lord?

This gift is called redemption, because it is the price or ransom by which deliverance and salvation were procured. What a ransom!--the Son of God, only begotten and well beloved, in whom the Father was well pleased---a being, perfect and excellent, was delivered up to death, even to the death of the cross, was numbered with transgressors, and experienced the ignominy and cruelty

of a shameful and agonizing death. How astonishing, how incomprehensible is the love of God to sinners ! it surpasseth knowledge. Must it not then infinitely surpass the powers of expression ; and can the utmost efforts of a creature to celebrate the goodness of the Lord, ever exaggerate its inconceivable magnitudē ?

On me, an unworthy, miserable sinner, degraded and dishonoured by my departure from God, in a state of actual rebellion against him, whose laws I had violated, and whose image I had effaced in my soul ; on me, and on a race of beings like me unworthy, was this precious gift bestowed : He considered not my demerit, but he saw my misery, and had compassion on it.

It is not for mortal men to penetrate into the depth of the divine counsels ; but in the death of the Son of God I discern two important things, of which it was necessary I should have the clearest assurance. The first of these is *salvation* ; and the second, *the way to attain it*. This is *the life, the immortality brought to light by the gospel* ; by whose assistance I am enabled to *deny ungodliness and worldly lust, and to live soberly,*

righteously, and godly in the present world ; where I must walk by faith, in those magnificent and gracious promises which are confirmed by the death, the resurrection, and ascension of my compassionate and glorious Redeemer.

It does not become us to enquire, why no other than this sacred and holy Being was sufficient to accomplish this great work. For since the adorable goodness of the Father has bestowed upon us his excellent and beloved Son, we may be assured, that no inferior nature was capable of accomplishing the important task. Was ever charity like thine, merciful Saviour, who loved us and gave thyself for us !

This work of redemption is the utmost extent of divine love. It is thus represented by the Supreme Being himself, who makes it, as it were, the criterion of his willingness to confer upon us whatever else may be needful for our happiness. If his compassion for the sinful children of men is such, that he afflicts them only if need be---if judgment on the guilty is his strange work ; may we not rationally infer, that he would not have required such uncommon

and painful sufferings, from so pure and excellent a Being, had they not been necessary to the accomplishment of a scheme of benevolence proportioned to the grandeur of the means?

The fourth and last class of benefits, which I have received from the infinite goodness of God, is that of *revelation*, which, with relation to me, is the supernatural mean by which God in his word enlightens my understanding, and fortifies my faith.

Revelation contains all that which God *at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets*, together with what he has *in these last days spoken by his Son*. How gracious is that providence which has preserved and handed down these valuable oracles, which are addressed to me, in consequence of my being born and educated in the church of Christ. When I compare my privileges, I who from a child have known the holy Scriptures, with those of a poor savage, who has no hope, and is without God in the world; how greatly ought I to estimate them!

Revelation, by the light of faith, illumi-

nates my reason, it gives me the knowledge of God my Creator and Father, and of eternal salvation to which I am called. What objects for thy contemplation, O my soul ! in a Being perfectly excellent, and an immortality perfectly blessed ! Without these hopes, what were life ? and with it, what are its greatest evils ?

I can now look to Jesus, as the author and finisher of my faith ; in him I behold God manifested in the flesh ; he not only announces to me eternal life by his promises, but, as my forerunner, he enters into it by his death and resurrection, and calls upon me to follow him. Thus is he become the way, the truth, and the life ; and if I possess faith in him, I may, with St Paul, *determine not to know any thing, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified ; counting all things but loss for the excellency of this knowledge.*

But here it may be enquired, whether faith alone is sufficient for my salvation and sanctification, which is a gift of divine grace not absolutely necessary, since *without holiness no one shall see the Lord ?* To this I reply, that faith in the only-begotten Son of God is sufficient, since we are assured that

whoſoever believeth in him, ſhall not periſh, but have everlaſting life ; becauſe ſanctification is a neceſſary effect of this faith which is *the ſubſtance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not ſeen ;* and an entire perſuaſion of their reality, will neceſſarily ſanctify, transform, and renew our hearts. Can I know the extent of divine goodneſs, and not love God with my whole heart, and my neighbour as myſelf? Can I perceive the benefit of eternal ſalvation, and not joyfully relinquish every thing in this world that may ſtand oppoſed to it? Thus doth faith in Chriſt Jeſus comprehend all thoſe virtues and graces by which ſin and the world are to be ſubdued, and my ſanctification and ſalvation completed ; for Chriſt is made unto ſuch as believe, *wiſdom, righteouſneſs, ſanctification, and complete redemption.*

By faith I become united to my Saviour, from whom I derive continual light. His ſpirit dwells in me, and with it all neceſſary aſſiſtance to work out my ſalvation. As a maſter, he commands me what I am to perform, and will hereafter judge me concerning my obedience ; as a phyſician, he

administers relief to the maladies of my soul; he is that Sun of righteousness which has arisen upon me with healing on his wings; he is an example, a model for my imitation, a conductor and guide, who will never forsake me in life or in death; and to the praise and glory of his grace I can affirm, that without him I can do nothing. Let us therefore be full of thankfulness to God for the knowledge he has given us in this life of the benefits reserved for us hereafter, and conveyed by that Word, full of grace and truth, which was made flesh and dwelt among us, of whose fulness we have received grace for grace.

Let me conclude the enumeration of the manifold blessings of divine grace, with the recollection of the succours and means of instruction and improvement it affords, and which surround me under various forms. And first his word, his sacraments, and public ordinances. In his word I possess all that is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness. Let me never cease thankfully to acknowledge the goodness of providence, who has preserved this valuable treasure,

and transmitted it to me through so many ages.

Nor ought I to be unmindful of those authentic monuments, which the great Mediator of the new covenant established in his church, for the confirmation and edification of his followers. In baptism I see represented that purification from the uncleanness of sin, which is the end of the evangelical covenant : In the Lord's supper I behold the mean of this purification held forth, in the death of the Son of God.

How great also is the privilege I enjoy in the appointment of ministers and pastors to celebrate divine service, and preach and explain the word of God. How solemn and edifying is public worship, where, with one heart and one voice, an assembled multitude join to present their adorations, praises, and thanksgivings, their humiliations, prayers, and supplications, to their merciful Creator and universal Father, who in wisdom and goodness set apart one day in seven for the suspension of worldly cares, and the prosecution of the more important concerns of our immortal souls.

Such are the general succours of divine grace established in the church of Christ.

What shall I say of those which are particular, and which are constantly at hand, were I disposed to improve them. Every valuable production of human understanding, every book capable of enlightening and leading me to good, I owe in some measure to the light of the gospel, which, like that of the natural sun, spreads its penetrating rays far and wide, enlightening even those who neither perceive nor own its influence.

I must not omit one observation more, before I terminate this long list of gospel benefits, viz. That every dispensation in the ordinary course of providence, borrows a particular and salutary efficacy from this economy. Suppose, by way of illustration, some calamitous event, adapted to convince me of the vanity of the world; this, were I a pagan, or what is yet worse, a Christian without religion, whose hopes are all centered in the world, would fill me with desolation and despair; but assisted by the light of the gospel, this event contributes to detach me more and more from the world, and to give vigour and solidity to my future hopes.

Would to God I had constantly availed myself of the multiplied assistance which divine grace has afforded me ! how many sins should I have avoided, how many errors in conduct should I have escaped ! how many good works should I have performed, which, alas, I have neglected ! and how much greater would have been my progress in sanctification and happiness !

Having thus concluded the review of those benefits which I have hitherto received from the infinite goodness of God, and which excite in me a *love of gratitude* ; I come now to consider, in the second place, the promise of future and eternal happiness, which produces in me an *interested love*. Let not any imagine the term interest to be misplaced here ; for a sordid interest, an ill directed attachment to the perishable things of this world, is alone reprehensible. It was this carnal self-interest with which our Lord reproached the multitudes that followed him---*Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled*. But we do not perceive that Simon Peter met with any reproof when he said, *Lord, to*

whom should we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. Let us therefore not fear to own, that our love to God is founded on interest, *but, by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, and God will bestow on us eternal life.*

Eternal life! this is the benefit yet reserved for me; and it contains all those blessings which the goodness of my Creator will shower down upon me for ever and ever.

The first character which distinguishes the blessings of heaven, and which gives them so superior a value, is their eternal duration. We are told that *the things which are seen are temporal, but that the things which are not seen are eternal:* And this is alone sufficient to give us the highest idea of their incomparable value. Happiness, however exalted or durable, cannot be perfect if it is not everlasting, as it is constantly verging towards its end, and therefore will become to the possessor but like a vain dream, which must for ever vanish. Not such is the perfect gift of God. He is the origin of life, and of life eternal; and will be the dispenser of eternal glory---of immor-

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tality. Secure of this promise, what is the instability of earthly things to me? What the frailty of my body, or the short span of human life? for when arrived at immortality, death with respect to me will be swallowed up in victory.

It is worthy of observation on this subject, that Scripture never expresses its magnificent promises by the terms happiness or felicity; never assures us of *eternal happiness*, but simply of *eternal life*, or immortality. The reason of this singularity may arise from these promises being addressed to poor mortals, whose transitory existence here is liable to so many miseries, which accompany them to the grave. To beings thus circumstanced, a promise which contains an exemption from these afflictions and from death, is in effect an assurance of perfect happiness; for it is easy to conceive, that beatitude must be inseparable from an eternal life in the presence of God: Here I am alienated from the life of God; but hereafter I shall be united to him, shall live by his life, and be happy in his happiness. What a reason is this for love!

With regard to the nature of celestial happiness, we can know but little here. It is therefore easier to describe it negatively, by excluding all the evils with which we are acquainted, than positively, by a detail of its enjoyments. We know, however, that they will be of an intellectual nature, that our minds will derive satisfaction from external objects, and from their internal feelings; that the glory of the Divine presence will manifest itself to us, that our society will be composed of holy and happy spirits, and that where our Saviour is, there we shall be also.

When I next consider the Divine Being in himself, and behold all his attributes and qualities consistent with, or founded upon perfect goodness, it produces, thirdly, a *love of attachment*. But as I have been led, in the course of this work, to an ample detail on this subject, I shall avoid repeating what has already been said. It is sufficient to observe, that the highest conceptions we can form fall infinitely short of the excellence of the divine nature. If our tranquility and happiness in this world increase in proportion to our knowledge and love of him,

what must be the felicity of a state where we shall see him as he is, and where he will be all in all.

To conclude, my love to God is founded on *gratitude* for benefits received ; it is founded on *interest*, because connected with life and immortality ; it is founded on *attachment*, because it relates to a Being infinitely excellent and amiable ; consequently, *infinite goodness is the only solid foundation of love*.

If it were possible that in the Deity any thing inconsistent with goodness could exist ; were he implacable and cruel, power might make him a just object of terror to his weak dependent creatures, but he could never be the object of their love. It is goodness alone can produce this sentiment, even in creatures comparatively evil.

I come now to shew, that this love to God comprehends every pious and devout sentiment, and predominates over every inferior affection. It disengages us from the world, it produces an entire submission to God, and confidence in him ; it creates in us an ardent desire to obtain his approbation and favour ; whence proceeds a salutary fear of

offending : On each of these I must make a few observations.

In the *first* place, where the love of God is founded on a conviction of his infinite goodness, it swallows up every inferior attachment, and *disengages us from the world*, whose love is incompatible with it. St John observes, that *if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*. We may reverse this proposition, and say, if any man love God, the love of the world is not in him ; because, in one or other of these, and not in both, is happiness to be sought ; and sure I need not remind any one how imperfect, how unsatisfactory, how transient is the happiness of this world---at its best estate it is altogether vanity. But when the love of our Creator prevails, temporal things are estimated according to their real value, and our hearts are set on the things that are above, where our hidden treasure is. We may indeed with cheerfulness enjoy the blessings of life, as a wise traveller benefits by every comfort he meets with on the road ; but we shall not suffer our journey to be impeded by them, or our souls to be cast down or disquieted by their privation. We shall

learn, with the great apostle, *in whatever state we are, therewith to be content ; how to be abased and how to abound, to be full and to be hungry, to abound, and to suffer need.* This is the temper by which alone we can enjoy any comfort even in this world ; and which will enable us to say, at our departure out of it, that *though we walk through the dark valley of the shadow of death, we fear no evil, for the Lord is with us, his rod and staff, they comfort us.*

Secondly, If we love God for his infinite goodness, we must delight in his will ; whence arises *perfect submission.* Convinced that his laws, and all his dispensations are wise and good, can we have any wish but to render him the most faithful and cordial obedience ; the most sincere acquiescence and humble resignation of which our imperfect natures are capable ?

Thirdly, It is not difficult to perceive, that from a love like this *confidence in God* must necessarily flow. Convinced that our happiness is in the hands of a Being who has the will and the power to effect it, we may repose an unlimited and unshaken trust in him ; and tho' the waves of trouble should

roll over us, though distresses of every kind should assault us, our courage will never fail, and despair, that worst of enemies, will never approach us, even in the most discouraging circumstances ; against hope we shall believe in hope, because we know that our confidence is in the Rock of ages, who can never abandon us. How superior is this trust to any we should dare repose in ourselves ! for where is the mortal we should presume to assert that he can never forsake his Maker ? The fatal and frequent experience we have had of our own weakness, should create in us a proper diffidence and a constant vigilance ; but it must not rob us of our confidence in God, who will do *exceedingly more for us than we can ask or think.*

Fourthly, and lastly ; Where the love of God prevails, a desire of pleasing him must prevail also ; and thence a *filial fear* of offending. Sentiments of gratitude for past benefits will make us look with detestation and horror on every act that might incur his displeasure. And if we are convinced that that our own happiness is promoted or injured, in proportion as we obey or violate

his command, we shall not dare to prefer our will to his. Beholding him as a Being infinitely amiable, we shall desire to be *imitators of him as dear children*; and thence must naturally proceed a fear of becoming odious and hateful in his sight, by any opposition to his perfect and acceptable will. Thus do gratitude, interest, and pleasure conspire to penetrate the heart with a godly fear of offending, and to raise in us a desire of approaching and resembling him on whom our happiness ever has and ever must depend, and who is the most amiable and excellent of beings. But if ever we should deviate from the right way, and our love should wax cold, should we thence become habitual sinners; then, as I have already shewn, when treating the subject of divine justice, may we justly apprehend that formidable branch of perfect goodness, which, being exempt from all weakness, will not relent, but pour down upon us *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish*, from which no power in the universe shall be able to screen us. Where then is the security, where the pretence, which can authorise any one wilfully to offend his Maker?

These various sentiments of piety, which I have regarded as so many branches of love to God ; such as detachment from the world, submission, confidence, and filial fear ; these constitute a state at once the most perfect and happy which is attainable on earth, and even a foretaste of celestial happiness ; because they produce a state of union with God---a union similar in nature, though inferior in degree, with that for which our Saviour prayed to his Father and our Father, in those remarkable words preceding his death, where he supplicates not only for his disciples, but for all who should believe through their word, *that they all may be one, even as the Father was in him and he in the Father, that so also they might be one in them.* Justly may our hearts be animated by so sublime a privilege, to disregard the perishable and childish toys of life, and to glory that we are not of the world, even as our Saviour was not of the world, but aspire at *being made perfect in one*, together with our forerunner and now exalted Lord.

This inestimable privilege belongs only to Christians ; it is the gospel alone which

thus unites us to God here by the mediation of a Saviour. This is confirmed by the discourse of our Lord with his disciples, in the eleventh chapter of Matthew, where he says, *verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater (prophet) than John the Baptist; notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven (in my church) is greater than he.* Let us therefore rejoice in the grandeur of our vocation, as members of the church of Christ; let us not rest contented with those external marks of union, which can only draw upon our heads accumulated mischief, if they do not produce a spiritual and vital union with God, which being begun here, will go on increasing to perfection for ever and ever.

Let us now examine the *sixth* consequence, which flows from the infinite goodness of God, which is a disposition to love our neighbour as ourselves, in furnishing us with the most powerful motives to this sincere and universal charity.

Though every sincere Christian finds reason to lament, that the gospel does not produce as much good in the world as might

naturally follow from its excellent institutes, nevertheless it has so far enlarged the minds of men, since it has been disengaged from the dreadful errors and superstitions that disfigured it before the Reformation, that none I believe will need now to be told who is their neighbour; they acknowledge, however their actions may deny, that their fellow creatures, being of the same common nature, are their brethren; and this is true without distinction of good or bad, friends or enemies, believers or unbelievers, countrymen or strangers; all are our neighbours.

What then is implied in loving all men as we do ourselves? It is to be interested in their happiness as sincerely as we are in our own; and for this perfect charity the love of God furnishes us with the most powerful motives. It is worthy of being remarked, that this perfect, this universal charity, from which not even our enemies are excluded, was never equally insisted upon, till the goodness and infinite love of God to all men was manifested in the gospel, where it is given as a new commandment.

I do not say however of charity, as I did of joy and of love to God, that his infinite

goodness is their only foundation, because it is in the nature of man to love his fellow beings; whence it is evident, on the one hand, that *man is, by his nature, amiable*; and, on the other, that *he is, by his nature, good, and formed for social love*: These important truths I shall endeavour to set in the clearest light.

In the *first* place I assert, that *the nature of man is amiable, and worthy of being loved*. I need not, in order to prove this, enter into a detail of all the noble faculties with which he is endowed; but shall confine myself to that capacity of knowing, loving, and resembling his Creator, which constitutes at once his excellence, his dignity, and his felicity: For though we often see this capacity for holiness and perfection giving way to criminal and odious sentiments, and a being amiable by his nature become the perpetrator of atrocious crimes, nevertheless we cannot help perceiving that this depravity is contrary to nature, consequently accidental and transitory, and must, sooner or later, be destroyed, by the complete development of his excellent faculties.

But I have said, in the *second* place, that *man is by his nature good, and formed for social love*. Many are the evidences I could bring forth in support of this truth, but from amongst them I shall select only the most simple and apparent.

If man is made after the divine image, his nature must be good, and formed to love his neighbour as himself, for *God is love*? therefore without goodness he can never resemble a being perfectly good. He may, by his intellectual powers, bear some resemblance to his Maker; but these are only given to render him capable of distinguishing and of loving whatever is by its nature amiable and excellent? He must therefore resemble his heavenly Father in his sincere and universal love of his brethren.

It is true, however, that in this love an essential and necessary difference must remain between God and man. An indigent and dependent creature cannot love with the disinterestedness of a perfect and self-sufficient Creator. But though a sense of his wants and a necessity of supplying them may sometimes deprive him of leisure or of means to shew his benevolence by actual

benefits, yet, unless blinded and led astray by some disorderly passion, it will not prevent his resembling his Maker by sentiments of universal good will; and so far will his own wants be from stifling his benevolence, that they will excite in him a more lively and active compassion for the relief of his fellow creatures. I conclude, then, that man is naturally inclined to goodness and benevolence, because he is the child of God, whose image he bears.

The nature of happiness furnishes us with a second proof of this truth. If man is formed for happiness, he is formed for charity. Happiness consists in the full exercise and development of our faculties: Now, among those the most active, the most lively, and the most delightful in its exercise, is the faculty of loving. The heart is the seat of this faculty, and formed for love, as the eye is for sight, and the ear for hearing. Those cold, insensible, and unnatural hearts, whose love is centered in themselves, must be wretched; happiness will fly before them, and elude their eager grasp. This is the situation of all such as seek their happiness in the world, and not in God. Wealth, ho-

nours, and power, though they excite such ardent desires, have a mark of falsity stamped upon them, which proves the good they confer to be counterfeit, not real; for they can only yield exclusive happiness, which belongs to some only in consequence of the privation of it to others; thence an opposition which divides mankind, gives rise to continual wars in public, and to discords and animosities in private life, which stifle the natural sentiments of charity and brotherly love; and in their stead place insensibility, disdain, and a barbarous and inflexible cruelty, properly called inhumanity, and give their possessors a stronger resemblance to savage beasts than to human creatures.

Far different is that happiness for which we were designed; it is composed of true, of spiritual blessings; such as the pure and lively rays of truth will afford to the mind, and virtuous sentiments to the heart. It is a communicative happiness, which expands and becomes greater the more it is diffused. Our Saviour, who was well acquainted with our nature, and with the felicity suited to it, has declared that it is more blessed to

give than to receive ; as St Paul records in the twentieth chapter of the Acts.

Besides, in order to confirm this, by representing it under another, and perhaps more striking point of view, man is formed for society, and must therefore be of a kind and benevolent nature, and inclined to love his neighbour as himself. That he is a social being is evident from the declaration of his Maker, who said, *It is not good for man to be alone*, which is true both in a physical and moral sense.

With respect to the former of these, solitude is not good for man ; because, destitute of the assistance of others, he could not procure a supply of his wants, but must either perish, or drag on a miserable existence. He is therefore formed for society. But can it promote his happiness if he is not a sociable being ; that is, if his heart is not naturally disposed sincerely to love his fellow beings ? Suppose, for a moment, a community among which no one was any way concerned for the welfare of the rest ; this society, without any bond of union, far from procuring happiness to any one of its members, would be a horrible theatre of odious crimes, and shocking misery.

That it is not good for man to be alone, is not less true, considered in a moral view; for solitude would cause him to feel a dreadful void, by leaving unsatisfied the greatest, the most imperious of wants, a necessity of loving. He could neither soften his troubles by pouring them into the heart of a being like himself, nor increase his enjoyments by sharing them; in a word, he could not fail of being miserable. But draw him from this solitude, place him in a society of beings like himself, rational, enlightened, pious, and good, cemented by that charity which St Paul calls *the bond of perfectness*, and he will be as completely happy as his nature will admit. The picture I have just drawn is not the effect of fancy or imagination, it is a faithful but humble sketch of the celestial society for which we are formed, and which we shall one day enjoy.

It was necessary thus particularly to demonstrate the natural inclination of man to goodness and charity, in order to establish that celestial virtue on its true foundation. But it must be observed also, that I assert this as it relates to human nature in its principle, and not in that animal and de-

graded state to which carnal and worldly passions lead : For notwithstanding any inherent good in man, he may be, and alas ! continually is, drawn aside by the jarrings and contentions of his own temporal interests with those of his neighbour ; and when this selfishness is become habitual and predominant, he is in danger of degenerating into the most cruel and ferocious animal in the universe. It is therefore necessary for man, in order to his following his natural bent to charity, that he should be freed from the slavery of his passions ; for St Paul observes, that *charity proceeds from a pure heart* ; to obtain this emancipation, he has need of continual and powerful motives, capable of exciting him to virtue, and of suppressing every emotion of covetousness, of anger, and hatred, the instant they arise in his soul. If, therefore, we are convinced of the infinite goodness of the Supreme Being, we shall find therein every possible motive of charity.

They may be reduced to three, as they relate to our own interest, to that of our neighbour, and to charity considered in itself.

With respect to the *first* of these, Divine Goodness has strictly connected our particular interest with that of our neighbour ; because, in requiring our supreme love, it produces, on the one hand, an indifference to worldly objects ; and, on the other, makes us see in our neighbour a second self, instead of a rival and competitor.

The love of God, by detaching us from the world, and purifying us from carnal passions, destroys every obstacle to charity, and leaves it to flow in an uninterrupted course. The happiness of others becomes necessary in order to our own, and we desire it with equal sincerity. Thus our interests become so strictly united, that in labouring to promote those of our neighbour, we are inevitably advancing our own.

Placing the supreme affection of our souls on a Being whose adorable goodness renders him the object of our love, we cannot fail of seeing in our neighbour a second self, for *he who loveth God, loveth his brother also*. Can we love God for the multitude of his tender mercies, and take no interest in, or concern for, the creatures who are the objects of them ? This is impossible. We may

therefore conclude, that we do not love God aright, if we do not love our neighbour as ourselves.

If, in the exercise of our charity, we should be called to considerable and painful sacrifices ; should our possession, our repose, our health, or even our lives be required of us, we shall certainly stand in need of powerful encouragements thus totally to forego all our temporal interests for the sake of others. But the infinite goodness of God is still motive sufficient ; for it assures us we shall be gainers by every action in which we seek to approve ourselves to him.

The absolute manner in which charity is commanded, the glorious promises by which it is enforced, and the dreadful menaces placed around it as a sacred guard to prevent its violation, shew it to be most acceptable to God, and absolutely necessary for our happiness, since he has, in his infinite goodness, connected our interest with those of our fellow creatures.

The *second* motive for charity relates to our neighbour, whom the infinite goodness of the Deity makes us behold as an object worthy of love. Are we not endowed with

similar natures, partakers of the same celestial vocation, objects of the same love, and sharers in the same redemption? We need therefore only consider our neighbour as an equal partner with us in the love and favour of God, and as a brother and companion in future felicity, in order to experience fervent charity.

But should our neighbour be our enemy, should his hatred incline him to seek our injury, must we then forget our own interests to advance those of an implacable and cruel foe? The knowledge we have of God resolves this question, by shewing us what is indeed our true interest; it teaches us to view our bitterest enemy as an instrument in his hand incapable of proceeding farther than he shall permit. We may, by every lawful means, preserve ourselves from the effects of his malice, as we would avoid sickness, or any other calamity; but by keeping our eye fixed on the adorable goodness of the First Cause, we shall never give way to the bitterness of resentment, but shall behold the blindness and wickedness of our enemy with the compassion it deserves; for of all the unhappy beings that cover the

earth, none ought more to excite pity than the wicked. Poor wretched creatures ! slaves to the worst of masters, their own horrid passions, and engaged, as the wise man observes, *in a deceitful work* ; shall not we, beings of the same nature, and liable to the same errors, feel our hearts melt with compassion for creatures who know not what they do ? No other sentiment can possibly become us.

The wickedness and cruelty of our enemy, by exciting our compassion, enables us to see him as God himself beholds him. Odious and detestable as his present state of vice renders him, yet when the means divine wisdom shall employ for his correction and amendment shall have produced their effect, when he is washed and purified, he will become our companion in eternal felicity. At present he persecutes and injures us, but a time will certainly come when he will do us justice, and make us ample amends. Far then from being overcome of evil, let us ever resolve to overcome evil with good ; and, in the true spirit of Christianity, if our enemy hunger, let us feed him, or if he thirst, let us give him drink ; thus shall our charitable

treatment melt down his resentment, as coals heaped on the head of a crucible dissolve the metal it contains; we must, therefore, according to the command of our Saviour, return blessing for cursing, and pray for our enemies. Such are the powerful motives with which the infinite goodness of God furnishes us for the love of our fellow creatures; even for the wicked, and our implacable enemies. *

I come now to consider, *thirdly*, charity in itself, as the most excellent and glorious virtue that can possibly adorn our nature. Sentiments of kindness, of brotherly love and charity, are such as can alone constitute any resemblance between the human and divine nature. Destitute of them, can we hope to bear any likeness to a Being who is love? Were we even possessed of every other virtue, what analogy could be found in a creature, whose sole care, attention, and

* It may not be improper here to remind the reader, in order to shew the exalted effects of true Christianity, that the Author of this work was most unjustly and cruelly persecuted, by a set of narrow-minded men—degraded, deposed, and, in consequence, deprived of subsistence, and driven from his family and country; we nevertheless see him, not only free from resentment for such unmerited injuries, but full of forgiveness and charity towards his enemies, and of a benevolence to all, which is not confined to their temporal interest.

pursuits were confined to his own interests, and a Being whose delight is to shower down on all happiness and joy, doing good even to the evil and unthankful? Where, amidst the immense universe, could such a being be placed to find happiness? In solitude he would be destitute, forlorn, and miserable; and in society he would be an unwelcome and unhappy intruder.

But when, on the contrary, our heart is enlarged by charity, which makes us sincerely desire, and zealously pursue every opportunity of promoting the happiness of our fellow creatures, then it is that we resemble the best of Beings, that we bear his image, and that, in our measure and degree, we are merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful; or, as St Matthew expresses the words of our Saviour, that *we are perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect.*

It will be obvious to all who are conversant with Scripture, that as among the divine perfections goodness and mercy are the most frequently and strongly mentioned, so no virtue is so largely commended or strongly enforced as charity: I request my reader to peruse the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians, which contains a description of charity, and

gives it the pre-eminence over every other virtue. Let us also collect some of the most remarkable texts on that subject, the first of which is taken from the above mentioned chapter. We cannot carry our submission to the divine will father, than in giving our body to be burned ; and nevertheless this act will profit us nothing if we are destitute of charity ; disqualified for a society of spirits who dwell in perfect love, we shall be excluded, and have our portion with the reprobate. How positively does this decision shew, that we cannot be acceptable to God without charity.

The end and design of the gospel dispensation is our purification from all iniquity : But wherein consists this important change ? St Paul informs us, that *the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart* ; this is the end of the gospel, and if love prevails in our hearts, we shall be workers together with God in his great plan of universal salvation ; for we shall desire happiness to be extended, and labour to promote it. But while our minds are strangers to these benevolent desires, while they are cold and indifferent to the interests of others, we may be assured that this happy change, this re-

novation of mind, is not yet wrought in us; and that whatever may be the virtues to which we make pretence, we are tares in the field, whose portion is to be burnt. But when the gospel, which sets forth the infinite goodness of God, has inflamed our hearts with charity to our neighbour, then are we such as he would have us to be, and prepared for a communion with the God of charity; in a word, we are the wheat which will be gathered into his garner.

The last example I mean to cite in favour of this divine virtue, we meet with in the 25th chapter of St Matthew, from the 31st verse to the end.

After having perused the awful and interesting picture of a future judgment which it contains, let us reflect, for a few moments, upon a scene at which we shall every one be present; *for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*, there to receive the glorious sentence of absolution and pardon, or of condemnation and punishment. We see that we shall be judged solely concerning our *charity*, and acquitted or condemned, in proportion as we have cultivated or suppressed this most excellent of virtues. We are told by St James, that *if we fulfil the*

royal law, according to the Scriptures, and love our neighbour as ourselves, we do well.

This is the law of our Judge, by which we shall be tried, because it was his great, his new, his special commandment ; for *he that loveth his brother abideth in light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him ; for every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.*

In the sentence which our celestial King, our divine Judge, will issue from his glorious throne, let us observe the tenderness of charity tempering the authority of a sovereign master. He places the least and meanest of the human race among his brethren, and speaks of the smallest office of charity granted or refused them, as if immediately regarding himself. How affecting is the idea, that whenever we minister to the necessities of a poor mortal, our Saviour considers the benefit as if done to himself. Let us not lose sight of this truth, and we shall never refuse to succour the distressed, or wish to evade any opportunity of doing them all the good in our power.

Descend, O divine Charity ! animate our hearts with thy celestial flame ; form our perfection, constitute our delight, and ren-

der us acceptable to the God of charity, before whom, destitute of thee, we are nothing. Come and unite us for ever to the greatest and best of Beings, and to his living image, our benevolent Redeemer. Render us merciful, that we may obtain mercy ; teach us sincerely to forgive, even until seventy times seven, that we may receive pardon of our innumerable offences. Sublime, delightful virtue, thou shalt never fail, but shalt form the blessedness of the blessed, and be a river of pleasure of which they shall drink for ever in the glorious abodes of heaven.

I quit with regret this delightful subject, which has furnished matter for my sixth and last consequence, drawn from the infinite goodness of God ; and I flatter myself I have made it appear, that the knowledge of the perfect goodness of the divine nature, contains every possible motive that can lead us to love our neighbour as ourselves. I have shewn the union of interest that subsists among mankind ; the amiableness and excellence of human nature ; and lastly, the attractive beauty and dignity of charity in itself, as the most glorious virtue that can adorn an intellectual being, and without which happiness in any state is impossible.

I have now completed what I proposed on this subject. But should the providence of God spare my life, I trust I shall yet be able to accomplish a more extensive plan, of which this treatise, though detached and complete in itself, may be considered as the foundation. My future disquisitions will have for their object the animal and spiritual nature of man, their universal salvation, and the knowledge of the truth necessary thereto; and lastly, the revelation of truth both in a natural and supernatural way.

In what I have said, I have adhered to my promise of drawing proofs from reason and Scripture for every thing I have advanced; and am able to declare, in the presence of him before whose tribunal I must account for every action, that I have not endeavoured to impose any thing on the faith of others, which I do not believe true on these two great foundations.

This leads me to a very important observation on the wonderful and incomparable excellence of holy writ: In the course of this work I have touched on a multitude of sublime truths, resulting from the divine perfections, the wonders of providence and grace displayed in the government of his

creatures ; and on some abstruse and difficult questions, in all which I have been assisted by the light of revelation ; which bears distinguished marks of divinity in its *simplicity*, because addressed to all men ; and nevertheless in its *sublimity*, because it treats of the wonderful works of God. When we consider that this sacred volume, containing the Old and New Testaments, was penned at a period when all the nations of the world were, with respect to the knowledge of the true God, plunged in the most profound ignorance ; that it was written amidst a people devoted to husbandry, without commerce, without letters, without science ; more ignorant and illiterate than any we read of among civilized nations ; and that it was composed at different periods during the space of fifteen or sixteen centuries, by near thirty different authors, between whom long intervals of years intervened ; nevertheless, examine their writings, and observe how they speak relative to God, to his works, to his providence, to his dispensations, and to his laws ; and it will not only appear, that perfect harmony reigns amongst them, but that they treat all those sublime subjects with the same dignity and perspicuity ; in

a manner suited to the majesty of the divine nature, and to the frailty, the wants, and the desires of mortality ; inasmuch that the excellency and utility of the Scriptures have been allowed by those who rejected their divinity. But whence, in the nation, time, and circumstances above mentioned, could arise such sublime knowledge of God and of his ways ? Whence a system of ethics so incomparably superior to any of the most celebrated Pagan writers ? Surely we must acknowledge this to be the finger of God, and this volume of sacred truth as much his work as the world we inhabit ; because, without his assistance, its existence is as inconceivable as would be that of the universe.

That the Supreme Being is perfectly good, is so capital and interesting a truth, that the whole of religion hangs upon it. When I am assured that goodness is the foundation, and happiness the end of all the ways of God, to myself and every creature, hope is the anchor of my soul, sure and steadfast ; for though *his ways should be in the deep and his paths in the mighty waters*, though I should experience every external evil, no affliction shall shake my confidence, never will I dishonour, by a mo-

ment's mistrust, a Being who has in mercy commanded me to cast all my cares upon him, because he careth for me.

But if I entertain any doubts on this subject, by the admission of any doctrine incompatible with it, alas! in losing this assurance, I have lost my all; and religion presents nothing to my mind but terror and desolation; the prospect of futurity fills me with alarm, and immortality distracts me. The greatest of Beings, without perfect goodness, is no longer an object infinitely amiable to me; and together with the love of God must every pious sentiment expire. Should charity remain, because the native inmate of my being, alas! it could only aggravate and insure my misery. So true it is that the whole of religion depends on the doctrine of the infinite goodness of God.

And if religion is thus founded, it must follow of necessity, that *every doctrine incompatible with goodness is false, absurd, and even pernicious and fatal to the last degree.* I have therefore, in the whole of this treatise, in establishing the doctrine of perfect goodness, and following it in its consequences, constantly combated such erroneous opinions as represent the Creator of the hu-

man race as a Being whose power will be employed in inflicting never ending torments on a considerable portion of his creatures; and have established the non-eternity of future torments. Let not mankind be induced to suppress this truth, from any apprehended abuse of it; because this is tacitly to deny that it is *the will of God that all men should come to the knowledge of the truth*, and to affirm, that some are best conducted to salvation by ignorance and error. It is also to assert, that in order to produce the love of God in the heart of man, he must be represented to them as a Being infinitely cruel. But lest sinners should abuse this truth so ill understood, it is necessary that it should be rightly explained to them, that they may not give themselves up to fatal illusions, either respecting the severity or the mercy of God. O God, thou Being supremely good, cause the precious ray of thy truth to illuminate every heart, that they may be filled with thy love and thy fear; and to effect this, open the lips of thy ministers, that they may shew forth thy praise. Amen.

FINIS.



